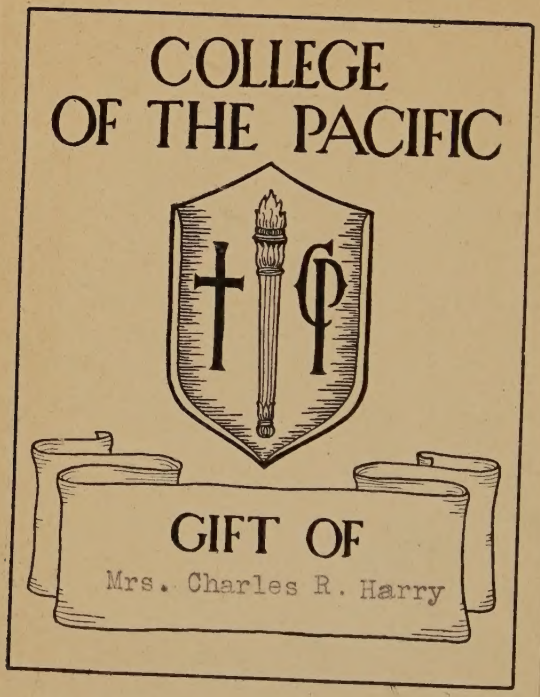
COLLEGE
OF THE PACIFIC
GIFT OF
Mrs. Charles R. Harry

Robert Rees Harry.

1520 N. San Joaquin St.

Stockton

Cal.

ONE INCREASING PURPOSE

Robert, dear.
from Mother
Christmas 1925

By A. S. M. HUTCHINSON

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

ONCE ABOARD THE LUGGER

THE CLEAN HEART

IF WINTER COMES

THIS FREEDOM

THE EIGHTH WONDER
AND OTHER STORIES

ONE INCREASING PURPOSE

Stockton, Calif.

ONE INCREASING PURPOSE

BY

A. S. M. HUTCHINSON

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1925

Gift
Mrs. C. R. Harry

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"Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs."

"God He hath strange ways and for the increase of His Purpose chooseth He strange vessels."

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PART ONE

IN FAITH

ONE INCREASING PURPOSE

CHAPTER I

THE BROTHERS

THERE were three brothers Paris; Andrew, Charles, Simon. Andrew was confidential secretary, right-hand man, chief-of-staff, to Lord Staverton, the financial magnate; Charles was Still and Paris of Queen Victoria Street, City, Business Advisers; Simon, shortly after the conclusion of the Great War, had retired from the regular army ("What on earth," asked Charles, "does he want to retire for *now?*") "mysteriously" (Charles again) betaken himself into the country, found a cottage and bought a horse.

"What's he want a horse for?" was Charles's comment.

Charles, thirty-eight years of age, was middle of the three brothers but he somehow looked the oldest. Andrew, forty, was noticeably dark; Simon, thirty-four, though deeply tanned, was very fair. Seen with his brothers, judged, that is, between these two extremes, Charles in colouring was nondescript. He had been much freckled in his youth; he now was greyish, lined, worn. Both his brothers held themselves very erect; Charles stooped. Andrew had a reserved, an austere, an aloof air; Simon an alert, a lissom air; the air of Charles was fidgety; he never was at rest; his hands,

constantly plucking at his mouth, were never still; and his face, without aid of his fingers, frequently was twitching.

Andrew, the eldest, forty, Lord Staverton's right-hand man, was dark not so much in complexion as, in a curious way, by the intense blackness of his hair; in some lights his hair seemed almost to cast a shadow on his face, and this was an effect maintained and emphasised by the deeply black pointings which were his eyebrows and the small tab of his moustache. Tall; holding himself very upright; firm-mouthed; of few words and those, whatever the subject, always direct, rarely genial; smiling seldom; laughing (whole-heartedly) never; of aspect reserved, aloof, severe, two words, it once was said of Andrew, exactly described him — rigid and austere; which someone overhearing corrected with a certain wit to " No, one word will do for Andrew Paris and that is your first, rigid; but you have spelt it without the f; frigid, it should be; that's your Duke Paris."

He sometimes (behind his back) was called Duke.

Simon, the youngest, thirty-four, the one " senselessly " (Charles) retired from the army after the war and " mysteriously " gone off to live in the country, was his elder brother's precise opposite. As tall as Andrew, the stiffness of the elder's carriage here was in poise and movement supple, lithe; as with Andrew his hair (though here bleached corn against the other's raven hue) was in a curious way a feature of his appearance. Close cropped, closely pressing to his skull, Simon's hair looked somehow rather hide than hair; and the suggestion set up by the word hide, the lion's or the mastiff's hide, was furthered by the limber build he had. " Tawny," following the hide suggestion, came aptly to the mind as well descriptive of his hue, his general air; his look, alert, receptive, responsive, had in it, additionally, something

quizzical, the look of one humorously touched by what he saw; of one eager to take a part in what he watched yet nervously diffident of seeking invitation; whimsically dubious of his capacity, if asked, to hold his own.

His look, however, in recent years had somehow changed.

"There's something *up* with Simon" had been the comment of Charles, noting this change.

Here, then, have been presented the brothers, each primarily in terms of his colouring; and each, thus seen, may be touched off (it arises naturally) in terms of a single word expressive, not of hue only, but, imaginatively, of characteristics also. Thus Andrew, dark, austere, a black Paris; Charles, greyish, stooping, lined, a grizzled Paris; Simon, fair, sunburned, limber, free, a tawny Paris.

These are characteristics markedly different; each with his own, alike of colouring, of expression and of temperament, even in boyhood was so strongly stamped that the rude, ready labels wherewith the schoolboy gums his fellows, and wherewith these three at school were gummed, would have enabled them years after — now, in their manhood — to be picked out at sight. All three went to the same public-school. Andrew, the first to be placed there, was, of that intensely black poll of his, immediately "Niggs" — Niggs Paris, a jolly diminutive of Nigger. He rose in the school, collecting caps and honours; his cold austerity of manner revealed itself and, by his position, found scope; small boys, even in speaking of him amongst themselves, instinctively felt "Niggs" to be entirely too familiar, genial and careless a title for the reserved, authoritative, and altogether striking-looking senior he had become. They invented for him and dubbed him with another and it travelled up to Fifth and Sixth circles and by them laughingly was approved and adopted.

"Niggs," said a fellow prefect to him one day in the Sixth Form Room, "Niggs, do you know what the lower horde are calling you these days? Down there, my black but comely friend, you're Duke — Duke Paris."

There was a general laugh, a general acclamation. Andrew became Duke Paris from that day forward; Duke Paris at Oxford; Duke Paris (but only, as has been said, behind his back) by a few — using it invariably with tinge of malice — when, as Lord Staverton's right-hand man, power and position in the larger world were his.

Only one person from that day of Andrew's elevation to dukedom ever again called him Niggs and that was Simon. Simon had heard it long before he joined his brothers at the public-school and to this day of their manhood always uses it.

"Niggs, old man," he says.

It always — nearly always — softens Andrew's face to hear that said by Simon. He loves — well, there is only one person in the world whom Andrew really loves, and that with a passion that eats him up like a fox inside him gnawing him, and that is his wife, a lovely creature ("A pretty dance she leads him"— Charles); so that it scarcely perhaps can be said that he loves Simon; but he is wonderfully tender towards his younger brother. "Niggs, old man, how goes it?" He likes that greeting. "Oh, pretty good, Sim," he says and smiles; that rare smile, gleamed and gone as a lamp flashed and shuttered on a dark ship passed, stern and purposeful, by night.

Charles came up to the school. Charles always hated going back to school even when it was his preparatory; "loathed going back" was the expression he used; and he loathed more than ever when the time came the shaking up that he knew would be his in surroundings and amongst

companions entirely new; and "loath," "loathing," exactly expressed the unwilling, rather sullen countenance he presented on his arrival.

It instantly was seized upon.

"Hullo, are you Niggs Paris's brother?"

"I suppose so," assented Charles moodily.

"Well, you look jolly sick about it. I say," and the speaker shouted genially to friends, "I say, here's another Paris — a sick one."

Charles was Sick Paris from that hour.

Came Simon. Here, at twelve years old, was an eager, yellow-haired little chap — the hair intensely yellow and almost grotesquely short — who hopped about on the fringes of groups at fun with an odd, nervous eagerness, longing to join, shy to venture.

"What, Niggs's brother, are you," he was interrogated, "and Sick's? You're like a lemon. Why are you like a lemon?"

"I don't know," said Simon, grinning, delighted.

"You've no right to come up here looking like a lemon, you know. You bathe in lemon-squash, I believe, to get a phiz and a nut like that. I say, you chaps, this kid's another Paris. His mother washes him in lemon-squash. See the stain?"

Simon was as good as Squash Paris from that day forward; but the nickname had passed between but few mouths when there happened, on his second day, an incident very unusual, almost unheard of, at a public-school — the use before others of his home name by a brother. No one but the great Niggs, then risen high and approaching dukedom, would have dared break the tradition by which brothers at the same school give always to one another their call-over distinction and no other: "One" or "Two"; "Ma" or "Mi"; "Pri" or "Sec," according to mode. On Simon's second day the great Niggs,

soon to be Duke Paris, passed him where he joyed, an eager figure hopping about revered new acquaintances who debated his stamp-album.

"Hullo, Sim; shaking down?"

"Yes, jolly fine, old man, thanks; ripping."

"That's right, Sim."

Sim! The kid's home name! It never had been done before. The great Niggs not only did it but, as term went on, elevated to Duke, further flouted tradition by openly and frequently showing affection for his small, keen, happy, already popular young brother. "Sim" was picked up, became general, stuck, remained with Simon all through school, went with him out into life — Sim Paris at Sandhurst, Sim in his regiment, Sim to all who knew him everywhere.

It suited him. It has an airy, easy sound and he was such. Keen, happy, popular, when first by his fellows so named, these as he proceeded through life remained his characteristics, and these somehow "Sim" suited. Boy and man, the thing he most enjoyed, the engagement wherein he was most truly the Sim his fellows knew, was any form of competition, any trial of skill or of endurance, even of wits, in which possibly he would fail but certainly he would make a tremendous, and always a sporting, effort to succeed. He had in the little crises of such events a gesture peculiarly his own, characteristic of his feelings and, so familiar was it to them, greeted always by his companions with a laugh. The gesture, if words can explain such, was one of mingled doubt and hope. Illustrations may show it: Taking the place-kick, when at school and Sandhurst, in a Rugby football match; the angle dreadful; the wind against him — the gesture was that characteristic little toss of the hand before he takes his run: "Can I?" it seemed to say; "By jove, I will!"; going out to bat in a cricket-match when runs

were badly wanted and wickets sadly falling — that characteristic little twist of his bat in his hands immediately after he has taken his stance: "Can I? By gad, I will!"; giving his company the lead going over the top in France — that characteristic little hesitation his men know so well just as he poises to spring: "Can we? By gad, we will!"

That was Sim Paris as men, recounting old times, affectionately spoke of him; meeting him today they noted in him that alteration voiced by Charles as "something *up* with Sim" and by Charles further elaborated into "Sim hasn't half the spirits he used to have; he is changed in some mysterious way."

He had; and what was changed was that, as the war drew into its last years, and very pronouncedly when after its close he retired, something very familiar had gone out of his expression. There still was the look, mingling expectancy and doubt, of eagerness to join in what he saw; but now a heavier, a something brooding suggestion was in that look. If formerly was to be observed the suggestion of being humorously touched by what he saw, of watching fun or having secret fun in what he watched, now, somehow, was presented the suggestion that fun strangely had gone out of his world, or out of the world as, since the war, he found it, and that he brooded as to where fun now had gone, and, a little troubled, sought it.

If formerly his look had been quizzical, now questing was the word; if whimsical, now wistful.

CHAPTER II

SIMON

His brother officers, as all his friends; as Andrew, kindly; as Charles, querulously; had expressed astonishment when, the war over, Simon abruptly had sent in his papers and resigned his commission.

"What on earth," the question came at him from all his familiars, "What on earth have you chucked the service for, Sim?"

He would give a note of laughter, slightly embarrassed. "Oh, I don't know," he would say; and it was all that they ever could elicit from him on the subject.

He did not know — exactly. He knew vaguely; but what thus vaguely he knew was a thing that he felt he could not possibly tell to anyone, yet, when he brooded upon it, longed enormously to find someone to tell.

"If only I could find someone to tell!" his thoughts on these occasions would go. There was one he felt he could have told but her he could not find. He could have told Elisabeth; but during the war he had utterly lost sight of Elisabeth; he tried everywhere for any trace of her; there was no trace. Sometimes to others, once in particular to Andrew, he had been on the brink of confiding, of unloading himself, of seeking, not advice, he did not see how anyone possibly could give him advice, but sympathy, sympathetic understanding; but each time, at the brink, had checked himself; had relapsed into that pondering and rather wistful look which was so new and strange in him; and shortly had gone thoughtful away.

" If only I could find someone to tell! " and he would pass in procession through his mind the faces of his accessible friends and know each one impossible; and he would try again for trace of Elisabeth and again meet bafflement; and he would look into the faces of his passers-by and wonder if this, or this, or this, contained the quality to which he might unfold; and he would, as the saying is, catch himself doing this and know it for an attitude of mind utterly foreign to his old self; and at that would reflect, with a twisting of his brow, " That is all *part* of it."

Of what? Part, he meant, of the vague, mysterious feelings which had caused him to leave the army; part of those same strange feelings which, their initial promptings obeyed and his old way of life at their behest abandoned, prompted in him now observations of life, thoughts on (for him) extraordinary subjects, which, when he looked at them dispassionately, filled him with bepuzzlement. Here he was, " messing about," as Charles in his aggrieved way but pretty straightly had told him, messing about in London supposedly looking for civil employment of some sort but, as in his own mind he perfectly well knew, no more than flirting with the chances that, through Andrew and through Charles, were being put in his way, considering them with apparent interest but without really the faintest intention of adopting them; here he was, at this moment, looking into the faces of perfect strangers seeking some quality (" and I don't even know what quality ", was his reflection) that might make him feel he there could outpour himself; here he was, arising out of that extraordinary quest, thinking how strange it was that sympathy should be so impossible to find, thinking that here were all these men and all these women all precisely as himself in the sense of sharing the same general conditions of existence and yet as hard, as basilisk,

one to another as those old pillars of that church he now was passing. Strange. . . .

He stopped in his walk — he was in the City; he had been calling on Charles in his office — and turned and went into the church and sat down. A church on a week day would have been an odd place in which to find the Sim Paris of before the war; but he had not then, as he had now, thoughts which attracted him to seek retreat in any quiet place in which to ponder them.

He was alone in the church.

He leant forward in his pew, his arms upon the book-rest. The motion caused his knees to touch a hassock, and without intending to he knelt upon it.

Immediately he began to think about his mother.

It was the suggestion of the hassock against his knees that caused him to kneel; and it was by direct suggestion of his kneeling pose that his thoughts immediately were with his mother.

His mother had died ten years before. He had been passionately devoted to her. Her death, causing, once the first rending sense of loss was healed, no apparent change in his then gay and easy way of life, was an event which remained, secret to himself, an active condition of his existence for ever, daily, thereafter. When he had been at home during her lifetime, and ever since he had been of an age to go to bed as late as she, it had been his custom to go in to her the last thing immediately before he retired to his room. He never missed. However late the hour, wherever he had been spending the evening — at a dance, at a theatre, at his club, at some wild affair with companions and with concomitants of which he could not have told her all the details — always he went gently in to see her and to kiss her where she lay. She slept badly. Be he never so late, much more often than not she would be awake and there would be a few words — where he

had been, what he had been doing, how she was sleeping — before, according to his established routine of love, he tucked her in, saw that her bedside clock was wound, her little treasures on her bedside table, the night-light properly burning, kissed her and left her. On the few occasions when she was asleep and his entrance and his kiss did not disturb her, always at their meeting in the morning " Did you come in to me last night, Sim? " she would ask. " Of course I did, Mother."

It was a matter of course, of absolute and unfailing regularity.

She died.

He was at home at the time, on leave from India. While she lay on her bed, shrouded, awaiting the last desolating offices, poignantly desolated he still went in to her the last thing and the last of the household to do so.

They took her away.

He still, while he remained in the house, went into her room the last thing before going to his own; still, as of old, and aloud, talked to her. He left home, returning to his duties. On his first night away his action immediately before putting out his light was, as he told her, " To come to you the last thing, beloved Mother "; and through the ten years that separated those events from this his present time he never missed the practice. He always knelt for this nightly talk. In the war, in the trenches and, back in the rest camps, billetted with other men, it had not been possible to kneel. It was not a thing you could do before others; they would think you were saying your prayers, and prayers, publicly, were not said by the men amongst whom Sim Paris had his habit and he was not of the fibre thus to dare the convention of his circle; his circle knew him for a notably clean-minded man, not for a religious; and he was not religious. But when alone it always was on his knees that nightly he talked with his

mother; and this was the cause, by direct suggestion, of the kneeling posture bringing him now immediately to think about her.

Additionally was the cause that he had been thinking about the reasons which had led him, suddenly and surprisingly, to leave the army.

His mother was very intimately concerned with these reasons.

He now, in communion with her, rehearsed them.

CHAPTER III

THE QUESTION

He had been right through the war, from its start with the first expeditionary force to its close when the Armistice found him but a short hour respited from hand-to-hand fighting; his leaves had been few, fewer, by this circumstance and by that, than his due share; he used to say, laughingly, that, "bar bank-holidays", he had not missed a single hour of the war.

And he had come through it absolutely unscathed.

He had been a regimental officer all his time — captain, rising to temporary Lt.-colonel, reverting again to captain on the conclusion of peace, retiring with the rank of major; no "cushy" jobs; always in the line. He had been through some desperate fighting; he had been in places where it seemed incredible that he could come out alive; he had been in corners, more than he could count on his ten fingers, out of which he had been the only one to survive.

And he had come through it unscathed.

He had never been wounded, never captured, never sick. In roll not to be numbered comrades had fallen, had been horribly mutilated, gone "missing", gone captive; of the officers who first came out with him with his battalion he was at the end of two years the only one alive; of the scores of men he was with at Sandhurst or had met in the service the barest remnant only remained. He unscathed.

Why?

It was that interrogation which was the root, founda-

tion, genesis and active principle of those "vague reasons" which so profoundly had influenced his career.

"Why?"

Why when men of qualities, these or those, infinitely better than his own; why when men of lives infinitely more valuable to their country, to their homes, to knowledge, to science, to art than ever his; why when boys fresh from school, not a day old in the field; why when veterans of battles fought while he was in the nursery; why when these fell in their scores daily along the frontiers of this world-wide war; why went he unscathed?

Why?

It was in the third year of the war that this interrogation first came to him. His battalion had been in an advance and the carnage, even within his own grim and terrible experience, had been unprecedented. They had held the position gained and someone coming up with the supports had brought the rumpled sheet of a recent copy of the "Times" and, his mind still occupied with the appalling losses of the day, he had smoothed out the page and seen the shocking list that it contained of mortalities on all the fronts. The two rolls, that which himself had seen or heard of and this which now he saw, joined their battalions and smote him, for the first time, with the question, "Why am I spared?"

He asked it of himself on that first occasion on a note that combined a lightness and a bitterness. He had been rather undone by what he had been through in the hours immediately previous; he had been affected by the death, violent and horrible and close to his right hand, of his greatest friend. The note on which he asked the question of himself, combining a lightness and a bitterness, might be presented as the "half laughing half crying" of a hurt and angry child. His words were, "Why the devil do I always come out of it?"

From that day of its first asking the question began frequently to recur; from those days of its first frequent recurrence it settled to a daily, almost to a permanent, occupation of his mind. From that note, impatient, fretful, half laughing half crying, of its first asking, it began to develop a note disturbing, solemn, having awe. "Why am I spared?" now was it.

It began, in his own words, "to get on his nerves."

"Why am I spared?"

It began so much to get on his nerves — and these were the days in which men might first have noticed the growing change in his air, the deepening of his look, the falling away of the old lightheartedness — so much on his nerves that it took him through two phases both singularly disagreeable to him. In the first phase he caught himself "funking." It never was apparent; it never was active; he never avoided, nor so much as thought of avoiding, danger; it simply was that, whereas formerly he never thought of his chances, he now thought of them and was frightened. "I have been spared all this time; today, this time, the next one that comes, I am bound to catch it." He was certain, he felt, to catch it this time; and the certainty, presenting itself precisely in the form of one walking a road known to be ambushed, ignorant only of at which step the rush would come, in that form frightened him. Would he catch it now, or now, or now? It frightened him.

He never did "catch it."

The phase passed and the second phase came in its place. The first passed because he one day, exasperated at himself, threw it violently from him; and the second came in its place because it was into this, from the violent disseverance, that he deliberately cast himself. He now *wanted* to "catch it." "Why am I spared?" The question disturbed him now in a new quarter of his mentality.

It came now to have an accusing, a minatory note. He resented it. It was "on his nerves" very badly at this point, and it seemed to him now to be pursuing him, pressing down on him, demanding from him an answer which he could not possibly give. Exasperated, he turned upon the dogging question and savagely cast it into this form: "Why *should* I be spared? When all these are falling every day, why the devil should I be spared?"; and he began now to want "to catch it", to seek to catch it, to hope that now, or now, or now, the thing would come at him at last and he would catch it and be done with it.

He never did catch it.

The oppression of this phase, the turbulence of this mood with which he opposed it, were in their full force upon him when, one night, alone in a dug-out (two who had shared it with him killed by a shell which had left him untouched, exacerbating all his feelings) he had for the first time for very many nights the opportunity of talking, on his knees, with his mother before he tried to sleep. He always felt that unless kneeling he was not having a "proper" talk with his mother; and, kneeling, he now told her, quite simply, (the talks were as real to him as if she had been present with him in the flesh) how sorry he was for the long neglect but how he knew that she would understand and would be all the more glad to be alone with him again now. And there was so much to tell her, he went on, and told her much; and then began to tell her of, as he expressed it, "this frightful 'Why am I spared?' business, beloved Mother."

"Mother, why *am* I?" he asked her; and his face in his hands, cried out again in very dreadful bitterness of spirit, "Mother, *why* am I spared?"

He had had communications from his mother. The manner of them was very strange. He never pretended to himself that he heard her voice or, as he expressed it to

himself, "any spiritualistic stuff like that." What he called, what he knew absolutely to be communications from her, was the sudden possession within him when he was talking to her or when he was thinking of her, of the "absolute *knowledge*" of some fact unexplored, unthought of, by him and arrived within him entirely without volition of his own. He never asked for them. Their coming was to him so amazing, so certain, so secret between his mother and himself, so sacred in the devotion of their mutual love, that from the first he had felt that to ask her for them, to ask specifically for a word, a sign, a message, inevitably would be to delude himself into thinking that he had received it, then to doubt whether he had in fact received it, and doubting, to suffer in time the certain calamity of being unable to distinguish between the imagined and the real. He therefore neither asked nor, carrying his principle to the fullest, even expected. In their own time they simply came.

There had been in all but six, and all need not be told. One, received when he talked with her on the night following the day of her death, was the sudden, absolute and exquisitely comforting *knowledge* that she, though in person absent, was as much with him as of old, nay, able now to be with him at all places and at all times, with him much more; another was the *knowledge* — sudden, unsought, absolute, exquisite — that he and she would meet again; a third, equally spontaneous, equal in certainty, equal in the joy inexpressible that it gave, that the time of their separation would be very brief. Whether in this his mother meant as she, now elevated to the eternal plane, was able to see time, or whether the moment of their reunion was to be brief as he knew years, he never debated. He never debated any of her communications. They simply were *knowledge*.

That he now with his cry "Mother, *why* am I spared?"

seemed for a first time to be asking for such knowledge was in fact no asking nor any lapse of his principle. It was not a question; it was a cry. In the sense of expecting an answer he had delivered no question. The thing had been a spontaneous, an involuntary cry to his mother uttered in a moment of uncontrollable and long exacerbated emotion.

But amazingly it was answered.

"Mother, *why* am I spared?"; and immediately he felt within him one of those astonishing, unexpected, inexpressibly comforting acquisitions of absolute *knowledge* to which those other messages from her belonged.

Immediately with his cry to her, alone in that dark and airless dug-out, he had within him the absolute knowledge that, through those perilous years and among those thousands more gifted and more worthy who had fallen and who yet would fall, he had been spared, and would be spared, because he had been selected, reserved, set apart, for an especial purpose.

That was it.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHANGE

The attitude of his mind towards it (then) must be comprehended. It was, simply, that he was inexpressibly comforted. He remained for a long time on his knees, his face in his hands, and his mind was in this sense a blank — that he was conscious solely of enormous relief. He was as one tortured by physical pain whose torture suddenly is assuaged; as one overpoweringly fatigued, agonisingly battling with sleep, who suddenly is able to throw himself upon his couch and slumber; of one who, for many seasons pent at work in conditions disruptive of every peace and amenity, on holiday suddenly realises silence, solitude, fair prospects, rest. In each example, transcending every other emotion, filling in every centre all the being, is sense, simply, of overwhelming relief.

It thus was with Simon Paris.

For weeks, first on its primary, suspensive phase; then on its secondary, exasperated, rebellious phase; had been tormenting him, "on his nerves", the question "Why should I be spared?" It now was answered; the torment gone; the nerves assuaged. There on his knees; presently risen and peacefully sleeping; anon out and about his duties; thereafter for many days pursuing his part in the warfare of the trenches; that was all he felt. He had been spared for a reason, and he now knew that it was for a reason, and he was completely comforted.

Than that he went, at first, no deeper. He had been spared because he was chosen, selected, set aside, for an especial purpose. To what that purpose might be, nor

even to suspicion of the grotesqueness of the notion that in the great scheme of things and by (it followed) superhuman interposition, he of all people should thus be nominated, he gave, at first, no smallest thought. The extraordinary and deeply unsettling fact of his preservation was explained and was settled; that was all that mattered; he was content; he was perfectly happy; he was himself again.

But in a little while he began to think about it. As the war went on and still, in the true phrase of the time, the flower of Britain fell, and still he passed unscathed, he began to say to himself "It is true then!" He did not say this in the spirit of one admitting verity where formerly had been doubt. He never had doubted. The thing had come into him from his mother and he accepted it, as he accepted all her messages, because it permeated him and was part of him just as was the breath he drew. He said it in the spirit of one realising, examining, taking intimate possession of, a knowledge hitherto taken for granted. He said, "It is true then" as might an Englishman one day realise suddenly to himself "I am an Englishman" and reckon over all thereby conferred.

"It is true then; I am being brought safely through this for some special purpose."

A mind of any introspection would have pursued from this its natural sequence "For what purpose?"; a mind with any bias to conceit would along the same sequence have conceitedly enlarged itself, imagining vain things. The Simon Paris of those days was far too virile to be of introspective habit; self-complacency he never had. "It is true then; I am being brought safely through this for some special purpose." There would follow the briefest moment's thought and then his comment. His comment was "Well, that's funny — for me!"

The war ended. He was for a year with the Army of

Occupation in Germany; then his battalion came home and he was for a year with it in the cathedral city that was its depot. The regiment was made much of by the wealthy residential sets of the neighborhood; Simon, good-looking, attractive, athletic, unattached, was in particular in much demand. In the old days he would have been in his element. He found now that he cared for none of these things.

What had happened to him was that which happened to many of the young men who had served through the war. They had been living, not only from day to day, taking no thought for the morrow because, always, there might be no tomorrow; more narrowly than that they had been living from hour to hour; their lives had been under rule; they neither thought for themselves nor acted for themselves; they thought and acted, always, as it was laid down for them to think and act. They came back to peace and they found that their horizons, which so long had been within the length of their arms' reach, now were stretched far away to encompass a prospect new and exceedingly grave — the future. They had been tethered as it were to a blank wall, as boats are tethered to a quayside. The painters now were cut, the wall gone, the quay astern, and they beheld themselves adrift. "The future? What am I going to do? What of my future?"

This was disturbing.

Simon Paris with these others similarly was disturbed. But there worked in his disturbance, additionally, an increasing reflection upon this very strange thing that had happened to him: his feeling that he had been preserved, reserved, selected, for some special purpose. While he was moored to the wall of the war, it meant, beyond occasionally seeming "funny", nothing to him because, moored to that wall, he had no volition or movement of his own. The painter now was cut; the wall was gone.

Volition was returned to him; he now could move. He began to think: "There is something I have got to do; there is some purpose waiting for me somewhere. Can it be here, in the army, leading this army peace life, these junkettings, this regimental routine? I do not think it can."

And then on a day his thoughts went a plunge that was a great plunge deeper. He suddenly thought "But these junkettings, I used to revel in them; this regimental routine, I used to love it. Why don't I now? I believe there is something in me that is changing me. I believe I shall never settle to this again. I believe I have got to get out of this, *got* to."

There was another thing that happened to many of the young men who had served through the war. There was noticeable in them a change, very marked, to social conditions and to social relations which formerly they accepted and enjoyed. In some this was manifested in a profound contempt for law and for order, for place and for privilege, for love and for human affections; in others it was manifested in a dissatisfaction as profound. For each attitude the reason was the same and was unconscious. It lay in long and deeply intimate familiarity with death. Death levels all people and all things; and these men for long had grown accustomed to look at all things and all people through death's eyes. They had seen habitations, great edifices, mighty works, domes, towers, churches, monuments, stagger before the callous rush of death, spring in the air, burst asunder, and go to dust; they had seen man in one moment of place, of power, of pride, of possession, and in the next, before death's callous levelling, grossly disfigured, horribly disclosed to be but flesh and blood, an obscene fragment cumbering the earth, a thing — no more — to dig away and hide.

This was the level on which (albeit unconsciously) these men had grown to know stood man and all his works; they returned to find property considered sacred, place considered sacred, men and women plumed, self-satisfied, self-occupied, believing themselves powerful or beautiful, demanding bended knee and court as such, scorning equality, hedged about by laws, customs, conventions to prevent equality, ignorant as beasts that one equality, alike for highest and for least, was theirs and would in time be made.

This also was disturbing.

Again with these others Simon, in this dimension also, similarly was disturbed. But again, and again arising out of the very strange thing that had happened to him, there worked in this disturbance also a leaven private to himself. He felt that he could not possibly tell anyone, even Andrew or Charles, of the selection that had befallen him; he would be laughed at, he felt, for conceited or mad; but he felt, the more he thought about it, a very great longing to tell someone; and when, fresh from the society of the Leveller, he looked upon the artificiality, the arrogance, the self-interest which on all sides denied a common level, a common end, it was with a certain sadness, a wistfulness, that he looked upon it. Others of his kind it filled with contempt; others with dissatisfaction; to Simon, hungering for a sharer of his secret, it gave rise to a feeling that if the world were not like this, if it were *different,* if it did admit and act upon a common level, then might he very easily — yes, at any street corner — find one, find a dozen, find a hundred, to whom he could unfold his heart.

This was, for the first time in his life, a desire for sympathy; and himself desiring sympathy he began to observe and to reflect upon the need for sympathy that was to be seen on every side, in every careworn face, in

every newspaper report of strikes, of unemployment, of misery, of want, of passion.

Here were thoughts, rapidly now developing into a habit of mind, here was a conviction (that he had been brought through the war for some purpose) rapidly now growing into an obsession, that were not consonant with his life as a regimental officer. They militated against his free participation in that life; and that life, its duties and its pleasures, militated against his entertainment of them.

And he desired to entertain them. More and more they became the subject of his reflections; deeper and deeper, as he explored them, they developed his interest.

His restlessness increased.

He left the army.

CHAPTER V

CHARLES

RETIRED, Sim's first move was on London, to his brothers; first to Charles.

Charles, who was married, lived with his wife at Blackheath, going up daily to that office in the City where he was Still and Paris, Business Advisers. The Blackheath house which had been the family home of the brothers ever since, nearly thirty years ago, their parents, both now dead, had moved there, was much too big for Charles and his wife who were childless. Charles, however, as good as owned it; he lived there rent free and the conventional phrase would be that he was, therefore, content to stay there.

The conventional phrase did not, however, apply. Charles hated the house.

When Simon arrived for his visit something came up of some inconvenience attaching to the place and Simon, in the good spirits of one not only come on a stay but making contact again with familiar surroundings, commented brightly, " Well, anyway you get it rent free, so I suppose you are content to stay in it, old man."

Immediately Charles flamed.

" Content! That is just what Andrew says. Content! Would you be content to stay in it, or would he, do you suppose, much less that Linda of his? Why doesn't he then? Why doesn't he come over and take a share of my burdens for a bit sometimes? Content! Infernal great antiquated barrack of a place; falling to pieces; never out of some dashed, bungling workman's hands. Rent

free! I would like you just to have a look at my bill for repairs. Content! not a room that doesn't reek of damp; not a room — look at the size of them, look at the height of them — that isn't cold as a living tomb. Content! before you and Andrew talk about content perhaps you will give a thought to the fact that this, this barrack, was built for ideas of fifty years ago and hasn't had a modern thing done to it since; not a thing; great infernal kitchen range like a battleship that eats up coal by the solid ton and never gives a drop of hot water; wait till you try your bath in the morning, if you are fool enough to have one while you are here."

"That's all right, old man," Sim interjected. "I have a cold one."

Charles took no notice. "Miles, mountains of stairs; not a servant that ever will stay a month; every door with about two inches of draught under it; every window about the size of a conservatory that breaks your back to open or shut; and passages everywhere; and empty, useless rooms everywhere; echo, echo, echo, wherever you go. I read — about the only thing I ever do read nowadays — a lot of this magazine and newspaper stuff about The Home Beautiful and labour-saving dodges and cunning appliances and things like that and I see pictures of and scheme out for myself jolly little houses, jolly little cottages where I could be happy, happy ——"

He stopped; it shocked Sim to see that actually he was wiping his eyes. He went on:

"And then I look around at this infernal, hateful place that I am chained to like a dog to its kennel, and then chaps like you and Andrew, chaps without a care or a tie in the world, come along and tell me that no doubt I am content to live in it!" He gave a bitter and an ironic sound. "Ha! Well, I have some fuss with the cellar door to see about; I'm the only person who ever

can do anything in this enviable house. Excuse me for a bit."

Sim said "Poor old Charles; I say, I am so sorry, old man," and, Charles making no response, "What is the cellar door fuss? Let me help. I am a whaler at tinkering things."

Charles was moving out of the room. "Not the least need, thanks. I know just what it is. Besides—" he gave a look that, as he intended, quite clearly signalled the difference between Sim's well-cut light tweeds and his own rather dingy dress—"You would only dirty that Savile Row kit of yours." He laughed meaningly. "You will scarcely be able to spend so much on your tailor now you are one of the unemployed, Sim. No, you had better go and make your bow to Alice. I heard her come in just now."

Sim gave no attention to look or laugh. "Did you? I never heard her."

Charles said, his face all twisted: "There isn't a sound in this house I don't hear and know."

"Poor old Charles!"

Charles without reply went off.

He did not go to the refractory cellar door. He went to the room which he called his study and sat down at the table. It was the only chair in the room he ever occupied and his most common attitude in it was, as now, staring before him, at intervals pressing his eyes—his eyes always had a burning feeling, relieved by pressure—and fumbling his lips. He was glad, his thoughts went, that he had had a go at Sim about the house, but he was also sorry. He was glad because it riled him more than anything else in the world that "these chaps" should profess to think him lucky in living rent free; if they didn't realise what his life was it was right that they should be told and it was thoroughly satisfying to tell them, to tell

them straight. But he was sorry because this outburst and all his snarling at Sim in these the very first moments of Sim's arrival were precisely what he had settled with himself this time not to do. This time! On every occasion of meeting one of his brothers, and particularly Sim, it always was " this time " that he was not going to be, as he knew was his habit, bearish; and always, immediately, bearish he was.

He pressed his eyes.

But it was their fault! It here was Sim's fault — from the very start. He had arranged, genially, for Sim to begin his visit to them on a Saturday, so that they could have the week-end together and he could go thoroughly into this extraordinary freak of Sim's retirement from the army and discuss the future with him and help him; and as it was Saturday he had not gone up to business and had been down at the station to meet Sim and affectionately greet him. *That* was decent and brotherly, wasn't it? And he had determined not, at the start, to say a word about this very stupid, this most serious, this mad step that Sim had taken. *That* was decent, wasn't it? What happened? How did Sim respond to all these most brotherly intentions? Why, from the start, from the very minute the train came into the station, Sim riled him — utterly. He riled him by arriving first-class, a man out of a job and without as you might say a penny or a prospect in the world; he riled him by springing out of the carriage and greeting him in immensely good spirits, a man who ought at least, having done what he had done, to have presented himself sober-mienèd; he riled him particularly by the marked elegance of his dress and the distinctive air he had about him, making people stare as if at the contrast he perfectly well knew there was between them; he riled him by his airy, free and easy ways — not offering to pay for the cab, giving his own instruc-

tions, as if the house belonged to him, about taking his luggage to his room; he riled him particularly again by never, right up to this point, making the slightest reference to the real reason of his visit; he riled him by immediately, in his room, starting to unpack from very expensive-looking suit cases and, chattering merrily away all the time, getting out and arranging expensive-looking clothes and fittings, even a trouser-press; everything, and everything of the best, for a man who pays attention to his personal appearance, and causing the room in about five minutes to have a style and an air that contrasted markedly with the shabby fittings and well-worn clothes of his own dressing room; and indeed it was these last, the trouser-press, the smell of good leather, the brisk opening of drawers and neat stowing away of fine raiment —" as if he has come for life "— that, when was thrown atop of them the riling remark about the house, had caused him to blaze up from his increasing bearishness to the outburst on which finally he had gone from the room. He was right thus to have burst out and let Sim have it straight, he was justified.

And yet ——

He pressed his eyes.

Sim had said " Poor old Charles! " Sim had said " I am so sorry, old man." He wanted that kind of thing, that kind of sympathy, that kind of tenderness, more than anything on earth. Why did not he respond to it? Why in pity's name could not he have opened his arms to it and told Sim how desperately he wanted it, and how all-out he felt, how beset, how driven, how near the end of his tether? Why *couldn't* he?

And yet ——

Why *should* he? Why, by breaking down like that, should he put Sim — Sim with that trouser-press and those boot-trees and that free and easy way of his; or

Andrew — Andrew with those two cars and that Linda of his; why by breaking down before them should he let them off the straight, angry words that they ought to have and that he was justified in giving them. Why should he?

He gave again that bitter and ironic sound that he had given before Simon. "Ha!" Ten to one, a thousand to one, if he got right up now and went and broke down before Sim, a thousand to one Sim would say, "Well, anyway, old man, there is one thing — you do get your house for nothing."

He said aloud, "For nothing! My God!" He raised his eyes and stared up at the ceiling. From the room above came sounds the meaning of which, as of every single sound in the house, he could perfectly interpret — movement towards the place where he sat; cessation immediately above his head; then movement again towards the further end. He said aloud, "Rent free! Free! Freedom! Me! My God!"

CHAPTER VI

THE PRISONER

In that room above the study of Charles was the man who owned the house and who gave Charles free occupation of the house.

This was a very old man, close on ninety; and he lay stretched upon a bed, incapable of movement, incapable of speech, capable only, astoundingly, of sustaining life month after month, year after year, and capable, further, astoundingly, of continuing, though moribund, the dominance that all his long life he had asserted over all about him.

Sim now was by this old man's bed, come up with Alice, Charles's wife, to visit him (Charles, brooding below, knowing perfectly well from the sounds all that was going on overhead), and standing at the foot, silent and uncomfortable after awkward attempts at greeting — how greet one dungeoned in that silent fastness? — gazed upon him, and basilisk by him was stared upon, and felt that dominance anew.

This very old man lying there was of great frame but in flesh was so emaciated that each of his bones, alike of his body when it was disclosed, and of his face ever to view, changing never, immobile upon the pillow, could be discerned through the skin. He lay always on his back, always along the precise centre of the bed, always with the clothes precisely at the same alignment along his chest; his toes always were the same small promontory at the foot; his face always was the same graven and impassive effigy upon the pillow. It had the aspect, his face immutably set there, of a plaster cast displayed for exhibition;

and the male attendant who ministered to him, by name Jule, a spare, olive-skinned young man of about twenty-five, always gave Sim the impression of standing towards that plaster cast and to those who inspected it with the air —"Take it or leave it"— of a dealer exhibiting a specimen which he knows perfectly well his visitors have no intention of purchasing; an air indifferent, detached, slightly supercilious: "*You* aren't going to buy it."

He stood now, this Jule, impassive, close-lipped, having in marked degree the inscrutable reserve of a well-trained man-servant (but he was of superior station), facing Charles's wife across the bed and steadily regarding her; and it was noticeable that whenever she glanced up into his gaze he at once looked down towards his patient then up to her again. The implication (to Charles's wife) was as of a message between the two and she the subject of it. She very much disliked Jule, but Jule had been his patient's own selection when the patient's dominance was active; now that it was passive it just as forcibly retained him there, and once when Charles, noticing this kind of message-glance, had commented on it, Alice had said that that was what the message was — a reminder that the patient was attached to Jule (he unquestionably was) and that Jule was uncommonly devoted to the patient (not questionable again) and that the patient's wish was law.

Alice had flushed extraordinarily when Charles had asked this question of her; but there was no apparent need to flush; no one knew better than Charles alike the patient's dominance and that secretive nature of his which from the first, when he had tried to hide his failing powers, had made a confidant of Jule, employed then (to conceal those failing qualities) as resident secretary-attendant.

That very old man lying there, Alice and Jule on his either hand, Sim at his feet, had always been secretive of

habit, recondite, uncommunicative, towards the members of his household; his eyes, in those days penetrative, lambent, commanding, always had been to those same persons the signals of his mind. He lay there now, secretive now beneath a seal ponderable as stone upon a tomb; and his eyes, moving as it were upon the face of that tomb, by that very quality of movement, and by their manner of it, spoke to the profound depths at which life here was entombed in death as speak to profundity of slumber the leaden stir and heavy sigh of the profoundly sleeping. Lustreless, having a dead, drowned look, his eyes were moved by him in their orbits enormously slowly, with laboriousness gigantic, as though they were enormous weights or as though, like a diver working many fathoms down, he moved them against enormous pressure. When, moved, they came at last to rest, they as it were sunk to rest, foundered as it were by their own burthen; and sunk, they brooded there; what lay beneath them lying (to the beholder) so deep beneath as not to be touched by plummet line, unfathomable.

They brooded now on Sim.

Sim tried again.

"Hullo, Gand!"

His voice seemed to him to come back on him as though he spoke against a window of plate-glass through which and to the figure mute behind it no sound could penetrate. He looked at Alice; Alice had just looked up and now was looking down, fingering the quilt, a tinge of colour on her cheeks. He looked at Jule; Jule who had brought his eyes from Charles's patient up to Charles's wife moved them to Sim then back again towards his specimen upon the bed. He scarcely ever spoke; the action of his eyes was the detached, indifferent dealer's action: "There's the exhibit; why ask me?"

"Hullo, Gand!"

This very old, stricken and speechless man whom he thus addressed was Sim's great-uncle. Always more in the relation to them of grandparent than uncle, he was called by the three brothers, accustomed thereto since childhood, " Gand," infancy's lisped attempt at " Grand." Jule always called him " Patient "; never " the patient," or " my patient."

Hesitatingly, a forced cheerfulness in it, Sim went on: " Hullo, Gand. Hullo. Are you glad to see me? I am glad to see you, Gand, very glad indeed. I declare you are looking stronger, better. You are wonderful, aren't you? Good for years yet. I have come to stay with old Charles and with Alice for a bit. I have chucked the Service, you know. I've ——"

He stopped. Old Gand, who fixedly had been regarding him, began with enormous slowness to turn away his eyes and to direct them towards Jule. There was in their deliberate motion a suggestion of contemptuous dismissal, of deliberate getting up and deliberately going away; there was in the manner of their going to his attendant and, arrived, of their resting upon him, a suggestion of appeal, of " What is he talking about? I don't want to hear him. I want you "; of assurance here of finding understanding, of confidence here of finding rest.

This, the deliberate dismissal apart, had a certain pathos, and in part the attendant seemed to respond to it. As he appeared never to speak so he appeared never to smile, but he gave to those dull and heavy-ladened eyes the shadow of a glimmer about the corners of his mouth; a look, as he passed it on to Sim and to Alice, that seemed to say, " I know; we know, you and I "; and for the rest, emphasising that these others were in his show-room not for business but for curiosity, he was the detached dealer again, indifferent, slightly supercilious. A fly circled and settled on his exhibit's forehead. He flicked it away

(salesman carelessly dusting a specimen which no one here has the purse to buy). "Would he like us to be going, do you think?" asked Sim. The salesman did not appear to hear. He flicked again at the fly, circling for return; then he negligently wiped the face the fly had threatened (salesman negligently dusting a specimen to pass the time); addressed it softly, "Back in two minutes"; and with that same kind of glimmer towards the visitors silently moved across and left the room.

Sim said to Alice in a low voice: "Does he never speak, that chap?"

"Scarcely ever when anyone is here. When he is alone he talks to Gand a lot. We hear his voice. He tells him everything that goes on. I don't like it."

"I don't like him," Sim said. "Do you still call him. Swiss Jule?"

She very slightly smiled. "We do. He got out of being conscripted on his papers, but I believe he is no more Swiss than I am; he has not the trace of an accent."

"Suits him somehow though," Sim said; "the hiss sound about it goes well; he has a snaky look, that gentleman." He looked at Old Gand, whose eyes were now upon the door, waiting. "He is wonderfully devoted to Old Gand though, for all his manner."

Alice seemed to agree: "He never leaves him," she said.

Old Gand's eyes enormously slowly had come again to Sim. "Poor old Gand," Sim said.

His voice had an absent sound; he was thinking; and Swiss Jule, silently re-entering, contributed by his actions to the train of the thoughts that he had. Swiss Jule half stopped as he came to the bed, negligently passed a handkerchief across his patient's lips (salesman wiping a spot of damp from his specimen), then indifferently moved on to the dressing-table. Sim hated it. He had hated the

fly-brushing business, he hated the dusting and the wiping business, and he had hated even the conversation, entirely regardless of the presence of Old Gand, that he had had with Alice. It was because all these were done entirely regardless of what Old Gand might be thinking of them, or if he could speak might say to them, that he hated them. He always had. He had attended and taken part in previous exhibitions of the same kind, and the complete, if unavoidable, indifference towards the feelings of the person principally concerned always had struck him as having a callous suggestion, as being in his own phrase for it "rather beastly." Thinking upon it now, hating it, recalling the last occasion on which he had been here and thought it "beastly," his mind, working on new planes in these days, was presenting him with an aspect of it which was not "beastly"— revulsion of the senses — but was in the one part profoundly mysterious, in the other infinitely pathetic.

Alice was speaking now to Old Gand. The sound of her voice died in his ears; the surroundings amidst which he stood dissolved from his vision. He was conscious alone of that great but wasted and incapable form and of those eyes which, dull and expressionless, still mysteriously were Old Gand. Death in life; out in the war, through every hour of many months, of years, he had been intimately familiar with death in life, and it had caused him, as it had caused his fellows, to look with a brooding dissatisfaction on all those conditions at home which seemed to deny the level which in death awaited all. Death in life; here, in a great wonder and a great awe, was life in death. This wasted body, to all active purposes dead, had within it life; those ribs were bars; this frame a prison. Old Gand, who had been mighty, domineering, who now could see and hear and understand, but could not speak or move or signal, crouched in his prison, must suffer these debates

about his person, these pawings, pointings, exhibitions, and not by even sign could show resentment; obscurely hid in some remotest corner of his cell, could not be reached, could not be communicated with, only by, as it were, stooping and peering within the nethermost recesses of his dungeon, dimly in those dull orbs of his could be discerned.

Sim never had loved this very old man, this power, this tyrant, now this shackled and incarcerated prisoner; as a child he had stood in fear of him; as a young man in awe of him; as an older man with no smallest sense whatever of attachment to him. There overwhelmed him now, standing before his prison bars, an infinite compassion for his plight. He had a longing, he almost gave way to it, to call out, "Gand! Gand, Old Gand, can I help you; can I do anything for you; can I get in touch with you somehow? I must get to you, Gand. You are in dreadful case down there. I must get a hand down to you somehow to help you. I never loved you, Old Gand, but I am torn with love, with pity for you now, Old Gand. I must, must help you. . . ."

"Well, well," Charles's wife was saying, and was touching him and motioning departure, and he presently was outside the door and going downstairs with her.

He went down with no word.

On the floor below, where was the drawing-room, into which they turned, Alice said to him, "He is not changed much since you last saw him, do you think?"

He uttered rather absently the one word "No."

Charles's wife looked at him curiously. "*You* have changed somehow, you know, Sim; a lot. Do you know that you have? What is it?"

He aroused himself and laughed. "Why, I believe that, rather late in life, I have started to do a bit of thinking, Alice."

CHAPTER VII

OLD GAND

THAT very old man, Old Gand; "Malcolm Still" as his letters had been signed in the days when he was active and wrote and received many letters; founder of Still and Paris, the firm of Business Advisers now carried on by Charles; great-uncle of the brothers; had had a very great influence on the early lives of the three; since Charles was seventeen he had been the preponderating influence in the whole life of Charles.

"All my life I have been under his thumb," Charles would say, "as my father was under his thumb before me; first under his thumb, then, ever since he became useless, have carried him on my back; yes, and my father on my back also from the day he crocked up to the day he died; and in the war, when business crashed everywhere and our sort worst of all, the business on my back; and all the family affairs on my back; always my back, you notice; never Andrew's back; never Sim's back; do you see how straight they hold themselves, those two? Do you notice how I stoop? Do you wonder?"

Under Old Gand's thumb, "as my father", Charles thus had declared, "was under Old Gand's thumb before me." The relations in their long association together between Malcolm Still and James Paris, the father of the brothers, were mysterious. There was nothing, as the word mystery so often connotes, sinister about their relations; it simply was that they were puzzling, difficult to understand; and the puzzle resided in the difficulty of understanding what it was, what quality in James Paris,

that aroused the uncommon regard which, at least in their early years together, Malcolm Still must have had for him. Perhaps it was that he submitted, as few men would have submitted, to that domination which Malcolm Still insisted on having over all who were about him; whatever the reason — and certainly it lay not in business aptitude, for James Paris was never but the nerveless echo of Malcolm Still — the relations between them, necessary of understanding for their effect upon the brothers' lives, briefly were these.

Malcolm Still was born in the eighteen-thirties in the City of London, in a fine old house contained in a quiet backwater off Ave Maria Lane, by St. Paul's. Resident in this house and practising in it, Stills had been lawyers for many generations. Still and Son was their style and title; their business lay mainly in a particular direction first laid down by a very early Still who, in the phrase of the family, had "nearly been a banker." A banker he did not become, nor any Still after him, but he handed down the tradition and the reputation of finding money for reputable commercial enterprises; and this was the business to which Malcolm Still, on the death of his father, in his turn and alone, single-handed, succeeded. By his day, and chiefly in his father's hands, the particular line of the firm had undergone considerable development. It always had been the practice of the Stills to assure themselves by personal investigation of the good prospects of the firms whose owners came to them to be put in touch with capital; this side of the work, as the complexities of trade and commerce increased through the years, demanded more and more of their time: the strictly legal business gradually lapsed; the business of accountancy grew: it was as accountant and not as lawyer that the father of Malcolm caused Malcolm Still to be trained; and it was as accountant that, shortly after his father's

death, he took into his service the young man James Paris.

There then was living with Malcolm in the old house of the Stills his niece, a young girl, Mary. James Paris, winning by means not on the surface observable unless by subserviency, his employer's regard, was given the niece Mary in marriage, was brought to live in the house, and here, within sound of St. Paul's, the three brothers, Andrew, Charles and Simon were born. When Simon was five years old the leases of the little backwater in which stood the old house fell in and the family, Malcolm Still with them, moved to the house in Blackheath which Malcolm Still purchased for their occupation and in which ultimately Charles was to be, but was not, content to live.

This was a singular ménage in which those three brothers thus were brought up. There was in it only one voice, only one authority and that was Malcolm Still. In that year of the move a man of fifty-six, he was then to the three boys, and in the earliest consciousness of each always had been, enormously old. Of great physique (" a giant of a man ", as his contemporaries have told of him) massively headed, fiercely eyebrowed, thickly bearded, deep of voice, stern of eye, imperious of gesture, heavy of tread, he was to any observer a notably commanding presence; to the boys a presence of awe. He instructed, when Andrew, his niece's first-born, came, that he should be called by the child not Uncle, but Grandad. It was abbreviated by Andrew and by Charles through attempts at " Grand " into " Gand "; as such was handed on to Simon; was adopted by their mother; became established.

There was only one person within the circle who never called him Gand and that was James Paris, their father. James Paris to his death always called Old Gand as at their first meeting he had called him, Sir.

Dogs by whomsoever of a family owned are quick to know who is master of the house; children are quicker. These three boys, noting in their nursery years that their father was entirely without authority in the place, that the word always was with Gand; when obstreperous hearing from servants never "I will tell your father of you" but always "I will tell your Gand of you"; came to their school years, when authority in the house was increasingly a matter of personal concern to them, without active respect for their father, without — it generally will follow — active affection, regarding him merely as, to use a phrase, not in the picture.

The phrase is good. In manhood, looking back on, discussing together the picture of their lives in that house, the brothers simply did not see in it, scarcely ever referred to, their father. Their mother, whom Simon adored, whom all most fondly loved, occupied their memories in everything that was gentle, lovely, pleasant, happy; Old Gand — they could laugh at it now, except Charles who if he laughed at old-time recollections laughed grimly as one who still can feel the place where was the sting — Old Gand occupied their memories in all that was stern, disciplinarian, repressive of licence, administrative of régime. Their father was present neither in the one part nor in the other. He was attached to his wife, and she most devotedly to him, and he was attached, though the attachment was not returned, to his boys; but his eye always, as it were, was on the master of the house; the smallest thing even in domestic relations he would refer to him; his place, his own feelings, his personality, never were asserted and never appeared. He was shadowy; he made no marks; he was not in the picture.

Their mother's position, as the brothers thought, looking back, might have been very difficult in the house, but as they agreed, on the surface at least was not. If Old

Gand demanded, as he demanded of everyone, dominion over her, she received it with a sweetness of disposition, with a gentleness of love, that could not but turn its edge as the soft answer turneth wrath. The brothers could recall him often shrugging his shoulders when gently countered by her in some ruling that she considered prejudicial to the welfare of her boys; "Have it your own way," he would say; and in all matters pertaining to their home life, to their early training, to their moral upbringing, her own way she had; and it was a way (now lapsing) that made to them their mother's presence, her influence, her wishes, a kind of home within a home, an inner circle, a sanctuary where always sanctuary was.

Thus was the household from the time of the move to Blackheath until, growing up, the sons began to flit from it. It was Old Gand who decided the manner of their flitting — Andrew to Oxford, Charles into the business, Simon the Army — and, so far as they could see, who supplied the funds; allowances, educational fees, every kind of payment of which they had cognizance, came by cheques from him; their father when he died left less than eight hundred pounds; as far as they could see he had been content all his life to let Old Gand be the paymaster.

Meanwhile, missing coincidence with the move to Blackheath only by a few months, had been established in Queen Victoria Street by Malcolm Still the firm of Still and Paris, Business Advisers. This was a departure in sequence to the merging of Still and Son, Lawyers, who put sound traders into touch with capital, into Still and Son, accountants, who by more modern methods examined into the affairs of businesses seeking extension; and the step was due solely to the vision and the acumen of Malcolm Still. As he examined the businesses of his clients he discovered in himself the flair for putting his

finger infallibly on weak spots, on wasteful methods, on overlappings, on neglected possibilities. This was worth, he saw, being paid for. There was a profession in this.

It was to pursue this profession that he founded Still and Paris, Business Advisers; it was into this business that Charles at seventeen was taken; and here is a point at which, by exploring the mind of Charles, much may be disclosed.

CHAPTER VIII

BOOK OF CHARLES

CHARLES at his study table, with that cry of his, caused by the movements overhead "Rent free! Free! Freedom! Me!" opened the volume of his mind wherein was written his life's story as he saw it. He had told Sim that he hardly ever read nowadays; but here was a book, inscribed by his own heart, whose every word he knew by rote. If it could have been printed and the proofs presented to him he could have corrected in it, so well he knew it, the misplacement of a single comma. It largely was his absorption in this volume that had lost him the practice of reading the books that other people read. When he held printed entertainment in his hands, even his daily newspaper, it never was long before some lines presented to him the contrast between the facts or fancies of which he was reading and his own life as he had lived it; and he would lower the material page and give his mind to the pages engraved within his private volume. He might open them at any point, wherever was the passage relevant to which his thoughts had been directed; but he always, after a very little while, turned back to the beginning.

Then he would read right through.

He read through now.

"Take it from school" (those were the opening words). "Take it from school, our starts in life from there. Andrew went to Oxford, to Christ Church at that; Simon went to Sandhurst and then to a crack regiment, the Pinks. I — I went into the business."

The volume is profusely illustrated. Here Charles always pauses, studying the pictures that here are interleaved.

"Into the business. One of us had to go into it; neither of the others wanted to; Andrew flat wouldn't, and Old Gand not only had a great pride in the way Andrew had done at school but in a way he rather funked Andrew; most people did, and do; Andrew was the only one of us who ever stood up to him. So Andrew flat wouldn't and Simon was all for the Army and no good for anything else and Simon was the one that Old Gand rather favoured, spoilt almost; most people did, and do. So they were no good for the business those two, and one of us had to go into it, so I had to. Why I more than they? Do you suppose I wouldn't have liked ——"

The volume is written, much of it, in the expostulatory style as though it were a case presented for judgment, for compassion rather, to some arbiter.

"Why I more than they? Do you suppose I wouldn't have liked Oxford? Do you suppose I wouldn't have liked the Army?"

Pictures again here; they are pictures of what he is, inset in pictures of what he might have been; this in a University setting, that in a military. . . .

"Ah, well, that is all done; all dead, that stuff."

Here, commonly, turning on the illustrations, reverting to the text, he brushes his eyes.

"All dead" (brushes again). "Mind you, I don't say that I wasn't keen on going into the business at the time. I will be perfectly fair; I always am; it is more than many can say. I *was* keen. I admit it. I was keen because I was keen to leave school. I loathed school. Here was my chance to be on my own and earning money long before either of the others. And I was, too; long before. They were getting pocket-money, allowances; I

was earning a salary. Proud? Yes, I *was* proud — in those days."

Pictures again; and he sniffs.

"Yes, and many is the quid, and in time many is the fiver even, yes and more, that I lent my brothers."

Here there is a laugh, bitter, ironic, struck on the same note as was sounded when in company with Sim.

"Ha! Much they ever remember now, or ever did, what I used to do for them in those days; or ever think of doing the like to me now when easily they could, Andrew without missing it, and Simon too, unmarried, only himself to think about ——"

Here he breaks the woven thread. He can break it anywhere; insert a passage suitable to the occasion, and pick it up again without a word of the original missed. He inserts here:

"So much only himself to think of, Simon, that now, if you please, he has chucked the Army; chucked it now, since the war, when the pay is three times what it used to be, and comes down here to me gay as you please, never an explanation, never a reason, never a word! Well, perhaps he can afford to throw up jobs and do what he likes; *perhaps* he can; he will soon see and so shall I, I expect; it will be turning to me again soon, I have no doubt, just as it was in the old days. But gay as you please just now; and yet I am not so sure; he is different, somehow, from what he was; I have noticed it; he has been up to something, Sim has, in my belief."

He thinks over this a little, but the text soon draws him.

"Yes, many is the time I helped them when I was earning money and they weren't; and yes, I was keen, I admit I was keen, *then,* to go into the business. I never knew, *then,* how could I, that it was a one man show, Old Gand's, and that even then he was declining, not what he had been in the old days, and that even with that he still

would be the only one that counted in the show, the top dog, the autocrat, the *owner*. I was ignorant and I was a boy and advantage was taken of my ignorance and of my youth. That was twenty-one years ago. Twenty-one years. My God, twenty-one years."

Pictures again; many of them here; and again, turning them over, he brushes his eyes.

"Old Gand had been the genius of the firm as he had been the founder; when he began to go the business began to go. Looking back now I can see it all; my father a nonentity; I — well, I *was* keen, I *had* energy, I *had* brains, I swear I had. In a different atmosphere, in a normal atmosphere, I would have made a name for myself. That atmosphere, that environment, that I was stuck into would have sapped anyone; it wasn't normal, it was abnormal. They got me when I was a boy; and I was in home-relations to them, too, remember that; accustomed to obey, accustomed to ask for everything I wanted; I never had a chance to show initiative and what initiative I tried to show was crushed in me, blighted, sapped. Old Gand was everything in the place; signed all the letters; interviewed all the principals; knew all the people; had all the old Still & Co. connections behind him and behind him only. More than that, he was concentrating ever since the day I went into the show on the 'Business Advice' side of the work and dropping the introduction of business and capital. The 'business advice' was like a new toy to him and he was crazy about it — and a genius at it. The thing was new then, and we had the field to ourselves; we haven't now, God knows; and there isn't, anyway, the same demand for it as there was then. I will say that much for myself. If I could be blamed, but I can't, fairly, be blamed for the bad, struggling state the show is in now; but if I could be, I can say that for myself — that with all this modern 'com-

mercial education' (as they call it) and all these stacks of advertisements of modern office appliances and practical application of modern methods, with all this there isn't the same call for our work as there was twenty, fifteen, ten years ago. I've done my best. I haven't had a holiday for — A holiday! What wouldn't I give! What wouldn't I give!"

Illustrations here again; but pictures these of imagination, not of fact; holidays, cottages, space, silence, peace. He is a long time over them; very heavily he sighs as he turns on.

"I have done my best. I haven't the aptitude for that side of the work. The other, the finding of capital, that I could do; that would have been easy; that would have been congenial; Old Gand neglected that and when he dropped out that, what was left of it, dropped out with him — utterly. This other stuff that is left, I haven't got the gift for it. It is all a deadly, deadly grind. And I haven't got the capacity, anyway, to grind as I used to; I haven't got the energy; it is an effort; I am warped; I am tired; numb; an effort, effort, effort."

He rubs his eyes, which burn.

"Two years before the war — that cursed war — my mother died. I was just going to get married then. He took advantage of that, too, Old Gand. He was declining fast then, had gone a long way. My mother's death hit him hard, he was fond of her; and my father was hit, too, badly; we all three of us were, God knows. And the advantage Old Gand took was to put it to me when I married Alice to bring her into the house to take my mother's place instead of setting up a house of my own; and my father backed him up; and I was weak and sentimental as I always have been weak and sentimental and thought of those two left alone in the place; and there were advantages, obviously, the house rent-free and

much else beside; and there were practical considerations of another kind — of offending Old Gand, of my position if I offended him, of the expectations I naturally had from him; wasn't I *right* to think of these things, to let those things weigh? Anyway, I did it. I married Alice and she agreed and I brought her here. I did it. The second tragic blunder of my life; the first allowing myself to be taken from school into the business; the second allowing myself to be wheedled into bringing my wife here. Two blunders; two tricks, two crimes."

Rubs his eyes.

"Then the war came. Ah, that war, that war!"

Illustrations again; of these some he turns swiftly as though he hates them; others he broods over with a twisting-up of his face, as though when they were drawn they racked him.

"That war! I got exempted."

He bites his lower lip.

"I *had* to."

Here are those pictures which, seeming to hate, he swiftly passes.

"I *had* to. I tell you, my father had gone sick then and he *was* ill; it was his last illness; his end as it proved. And Old Gand, much further down hill in the two years since my mother's death; *much;* almost then what in the very pit of the war he became and has been ever since, the dead-weight, the dead-hand, the living death. I tell you, I *had* to get exempted."

Painfully now, but he does not seem to feel it, his teeth upon his lip.

"I *had* to. Everything would have smashed, the business would have smashed; Old Gand, my father, my wife, all dependent on me, would have smashed; everything would have gone if I had been taken. I *had* to get exempted."

Here stops and does not look at text or pictures, only broods.

"Well, there I was with it; with that war and with that business to hold up and with all those dependent on me to hold up, and with that conscription and exemption business and all the indignities and degradations that meant to hold up; there I was with it, and I tell you that those years, those nightmare years, crushed right out of me the last energy, the last happiness, the last of everything that is worth having in life that ever I had had and I never had my share, never. Nightmare! Those war years did me as they did thousands like me who had to stay at home and carry on. I tell you the thing got so that I had the living nightmare, day and night, that I literally was holding up the business and all that belonged to it with my back; saw myself and felt myself down, right down on all fours, holding up a building that was collapsing on me, my father dying in it, Old Gand as good as dead and tyrannical and insupportable as an Old Man of the Sea in it. . . .

"That war! Those years!"

Pictures at sight of which his face is ravelled up in pain.

"In 1916 my father died. I wired to Andrew and to Simon in France. Much they cared! I don't mean cared about my father's death; they may have or they may not; he never was very much to any of us, my father. No, I mean cared about *me,* gave a thought to all the new trouble and work and perplexities that his death and all the matters connected with it put on *me.* Much they thought of that! It was the old story with them; 'Charles is there; Charles is the one on the spot; leave it all to Charles.' I don't say they hadn't other things to think of; I don't say they weren't doing their bit; they were, although a staff billet like Andrew's . . . What I

say is that if they had thought of me as all my life I have thought of them they would have got away somehow and come over and helped me. Whatever they were going through they weren't going through the strain that all of us at home, holding up businesses and holding up homes, were going through.

"I did want help. My father's affairs were in an awful state, mixed up inextricably with Old Gand's and Old Gand then almost the living mute that he soon became, refusing to open his mouth, refusing to explain how things stood between them, refusing to sign papers. I tell you that there was scarcely a penny and scarcely a thing — a bit of furniture, anything — that you rightly could contend was rightly my father's own. It is absolutely the same, for that matter, with me at this very moment. What have I got? What is really my own? Good God, if Old Gand were to get off his bed this minute and come downstairs and turn me out what penny in the world would I have? That is the position I have got into. That is my position."

He broods.

"It was awful, the worry of it. It was bad enough taking out probates and all that before the war; during the war it sheer drove one mad. Everywhere the attitude was 'Why are you fussing? Why are you hurrying? Don't you know there is a war on?' And with it, from elderly men and from women, the attitude, the implication, 'What are you doing here, anyway? Why aren't you in Khaki?' God, how I hated that phrase."

His face twitches.

"Andrew and Simon and I could have tackled it together, easily. Andrew could have got leave easily. I know he could. He got it scores of times; seems to me he was always at home; scores of times to come home and flaunt about with that wife of his. But he swore he

couldn't: — 'Come like a shot if I could but of course I just can't.' Tchat! He came at last, when it was useless, when I had got everything in my own hands and didn't want him. Yes, he came then; got fifteen days and spent two with us, and the rest with his wife and her swagger friends. Well, he will know all about *that* one day—much good that Linda is doing him or will do him soon or late. I can see. I am not a fool. I know where she is heading him for; divorce court or bankruptcy court; a toss-up which; both if you ask me. He will know all about it one day, Mr. Duke Andrew. . . .

" As for Sim, Sim never got leave at all to help with the death, never came home at all till seven months after it was all over. Perhaps *he* couldn't. Funny thing, though, how often some young officers managed to get over. No, it is no good them making excuses when I try to make them see things, and no good them saying they are sorry. They *can't* see things. They are blind selfish, selfish-blind. They have got, and they have always had, both of them, everything that makes happiness. I have got, and I have always had, *chains*."

He broods. He stretches down his right arm and pulls open the lower drawer of his desk and bends in his chair to look down upon it. It is filled with pictures, cut from periodicals and from advertisements, of pleasant country cottages; there also are many sheets of paper on which, with a certain rough skill, he has designed ideal cottage home interiors. He turns over the pile, gazing down on it. He makes a sound more near to groan than sigh and pushes in the drawer and leans his head upon one hand.

" Chains! "

He droops back then in his chair and he resumes his reading.

" Do they ever try to think, Andrew or Simon, does anyone, even my wife, ever try to think, what my life is?

I am chained and always have been chained so tight I can't move. I have got that old man, dead but alive, alive but dead, up there and I can't leave the place, ever. I haven't had a holiday, I haven't had a week-end away, not in years. It's no good saying I could get away if I liked. I can't get away. Any moment some change might come in him, and if any change comes, if he can speak, if he can answer questions, I have got to be there. It is vital I should be there. Suppose he speaks one day and asks for me and I am not there, I am jaunting off (me, jaunting off!) on a holiday somewhere? Jule would tell him that, and use that expression and all that it would imply, pretty quick. And suppose then that he made his Will or changed his Will. Where would I be then, him in that man's clutches? I don't know if he has got a Will. I know absolutely no more about his affairs, what he has got or what he hasn't got, than the man I'll sit next to in the train tomorrow. He's got everything in his own hands, in his own secrecy, and his hands are dead and his secrecy is sealed as the grave. There is the business; apart from anything else, if he should get speech and me away, there is the business. Ever since I have known him he has kept that absolutely in private account. I have been paid, as I still am paid and as my father was paid, monthly by banker's order and since he collapsed I have had, for capital and for outgoings, what the business has made — enough, barely enough, to pay its way; and there has always been, to my wife, by banker's order again, money for the housekeeping. I'm a salaried servant, no more; and if he died tomorrow I'd not know if there'd be thousands or if there'd be nothing, or if the very business would be mine or if he had made it away to someone else."

He is at the last pages now; though, commonly, concluding them, their final summary —" That's my life "—

will be the very impetus, the prick, that will turn him back to "Take it from school," the opening words again.

"That's my life. Do they ever try to realise, Andrew and Simon, that that is what it is; does anyone, even my wife? You might say she shares it. She doesn't. She can get away sometimes; she does, in the summer for a bit, to her relations. I can't. With me there is none to share it, none to understand it, none to sympathise with it, as I would to God, to God, that someone did; with me it just goes on, no change, no rest, no break, no joy, no hope. Chains! That is my life."

CHAPTER IX

A NOTE ON THE BOOK

It is a sorry document, that book of Charles.

"Those about Charles," runs a commentary written on it in after years, "Those about Charles, those living with him, meeting him in everyday life, those, too, not knowing him at all, reading his story as a book is read; doubtless would have told it differently. They would have showed, I have no doubt, how himself, his crabbed (as they would have said) self-sorry, embittered, envious nature was to blame, and with impatience would have tossed it aside, despised the teller, stigmatised the thing 'a whine.' But I say (says this commentator) that when Charles thus was telling it, he was telling it — as all men tell their lives when similarly in the solitude of their own breasts they con then — not as others may have seen it, but as (God help poor Charles) himself, the Charles whom no one but himself had met, *had lived it*. And he was telling it, expostulating, pleading, not to a living person, but to that sense, subconscious, of the existence of an element all-knowing, all-understanding, of infinite compassion, which man out of the mystery of his being creates and whereby, I say it, unwittingly man testifies to God.

"He had no active religious belief, Charles; and one in ten of all this his generation has no active belief. But I maintain that when the indifferent, more when the open sceptic, cries to the night the hardness of his lot, when he lays it before that sense, self-created but unconscious, evolved out of instinct but uncomprehended,

which he knows would understand everything, with everything would sympathise; I say that there, forced out of him by Christ (his instinct) within him, he testifies that God *is*.

"I say (proceeds this commentator) that there is no human story, no case as presented by the man who has lived it, which, if we look at it not with the eyes of the multitude but with the eyes of the Good Samaritan, paused to stoop and look deeper, is not a case for infinite compassion. The worse the case the more the pity. The worse a man's case the more he should be judged, not by what he is but by what he might have been; not backwards from what he has become, but forwards from where he started. There only would be pity then; no censure. For (he concludes) we all came trailing clouds of glory at our start."

The thing — accepting this view — immediately for pity in Charles's story is that there is missing in it entirely, is not so much as to be glimpsed in any single phrase, the element of love; and the thought that arises with and out of this discovery is that, save only in passing reference to his marriage, he never mentions his wife.

There is a reason for it. The reason that Charles in the book of his mind entirely omits his wife is that, in the time to which he then had come, his attitude towards her was that he merely accepted her existence precisely as he accepted the existence of every other normal and invariable figment of his daily routine. He was nothing active to her, he was purely passive to her; he did not quarrel with her, he was not neglectful of her; he merely, passively, accepted her. In all their daily, yearly relations together, there was only one thing that ever aroused in Charles any active feeling towards his wife, and that was a mannerism she had; a habit of phrase; her way, when no more than a simple affirmative was required,

of saying "Yes." Charles used to love it; he now loathed it. The sound "Yes" is customarily a slight exhalation of the breath, an outward sibilant. Charles's wife had a trick of making it with an inspiration of the breath, done on an inward catch, a "Yeh" sound. He used to love the trick; he loathed it now. It irritated him. It sometimes exasperated him. Positively there sometimes were occasions when he found himself waiting for it in hate and dread. Positively it then would be like acid on his waiting nerves.

Alas, the traitors to ourselves we come to be! It was that very trick of hers, that very "funny little way" (he then had called it) of saying "Yes" that when they first met attracted him to her. It was that very sound, no other, that on a day within her mother's garden topped up his mounting senses and made him catch her in his arms and strain her to his heart and cry, deep, vibrant, as the set of sea to sea, "But I love you, but I love you, my dear, my own, my darling!"

And now ——

Alas, the traitors to our youth we are.

CHAPTER X

ALICE (I)

THE wife of Charles, who now was thirty-two, was pretty in a pale way. She was fond (she told herself) of Charles, but she was as passive towards Charles as Charles was towards her; she did not quarrel with him, she did not neglect him but, as he to her, she was nothing active towards him, she merely accepted him. The case of these two people was, put in common words, that in the eight years of their married life the fires of love had burnt out. They sat, as sit so many couples, on either side of a hearth where once had been a glowing blaze; where later had been waning light; where now were embers, almost cold; where soon, unless one stirred to tend the almost vanished warmth, ashes would be.

Alice, when she told herself that she was fond of Charles, might be thought thus to be stirring to kindle before it died away the final gleam. In fact, her gesture when she thus assured herself was rather that of one glancing at the fire and saying: "It will suffice; no need yet to attend to it." In fact, grown well accustomed to this hearth and believing that what had gone on so long without attention always would go on, she was playing with other fire; and it was when this other fire sometimes alarmingly would blaze that, alarmed, she would look towards the blackening hearth and tell herself it yet had life. In fact, it was when the new attraction she was finding attracted her with sudden force that, dismayed a little, she would look towards Charles and tell herself that she was fond of Charles.

Sim very early in his visit thought that he noticed a change in Alice since he last had seen her. There appeared to him frequently a certain nervousness in her manner, rather as though she were apprehensive of something; but when he thought he observed it he could neither see nor imagine any reason for it. He kept thinking that he noticed it, nevertheless, both in her manner towards him (and they were excellent friends, he and Alice), and in her manner with Charles; and though Sim knew that Charles and Alice were far from being what is called a devoted couple their relations always appeared to him ordinary enough.

On the third evening of his stay, sitting with her in her drawing-room, Charles just left to write some letters, he touched the matter.

"Alice, you told me the other day that you thought I had changed. Do you know, I think you have, somehow."

She flushed.

She held up the needlework on which she was engaged. The action was as though to examine it at arms' length; but she had felt herself flush; she knew it was the fire with which she was playing that thus had caused her cheeks to redden and it was as if to shield them from the blaze, but actually it was to hide their signal from Sim's eyes, that she put up this screen.

She lowered it and laughed. "Sim, that is tu-quoque, and that will never do. Didn't you tell me that the change in you is because you now are doing some thinking? Well, tu-quoque is the sign, isn't it, of a vacant mind? You can't be doing the heavy thinking act if your mind is vacant."

Sim also laughed. "That doesn't catch me in the least," he said. "Tu-quoque is a rotten defence to a charge. The heavy thinking simply flattens it out, any-

way. I say that you have changed. That is the observation of the heavy thinking directed upon you."

She bent her face over her needle. "Sim, for goodness' sake don't be thinking about me. I don't like it. It is like being watched."

He said lightly: "That's all right. It is being watched."

"I mean being spied on."

Her tone was not light; quick and nervous, it was of a part with that very nervousness of manner which had made him think her changed and he noticed it. "Ah, don't be a goose, Alice. As to spying, the position is already filled in this house I always think."

She looked up. "You mean Swiss Jule?"

He nodded. "He always gives me the feeling of spying, spying to tell Old Gand."

Alice said, "He does me. I am sure of it." She laid down her work on her lap. "Oh, Sim, I am awfully glad you have come. It is jolly to have you in the house."

He crossed over to her and patted her shoulder. "Nice Alice! It is nice to hear you say that."

She smiled up at him. "Tell me how I have changed, Sim."

"Oh, it is nothing. It is only fun."

"No, you wouldn't have said it for fun."

"Well, it is only fancy then."

"What have you fancied?"

"Why, nothing at all; I don't know; it is hard to say. I tell you what, to make a shot at it. I remember two times in my life — once with Old Gand when I was a kid, once with my adjutant when I was a subaltern — when I was desperately anxious that a certain subject should not come up in conversation. Whenever there was a pause I dashed in with something to prevent it; whenever there was talk and the talk getting warm I dashed in with something to lead it away."

She said, "Well?"

"Well, I believe that is rather the kind of impression you have given me — of, of funking some subject."

She breathed, "Oh, Sim!"

He was gone past and behind her, looking at some books. At her tone he turned quickly. "Why, Alice, what is up? *Is* anything up?"

She shook her head.

"There is, though. The way you spoke just now. What is the trouble? Tell me, Alice, old girl."

The door opened and Charles came in.

Charles said, "Sim, I have got Conrad Bryne on the phone. He has just rung up. Would you mind very much if he came in tonight for some more chess?"

"Not in the world, old man; why ever should I?"

Charles seemed hesitant. "Well, we were playing last night and it seems rather rotten when you have just arrived ——"

"Tish and tush," said Sim gaily. "What rot! Matter of fact I am very keen to take Alice on at picquet again tonight. Alice and I play picquet and no chess, you and this new doctor chap chess and no picquet; it's a kind of Jack Spratt and his wife. Fine arrangement, I call it. Have him in by all means."

"Well, if you really feel like that. You agree, Alice?"

She said quietly, "Oh, yes."

"I will tell him then," Charles said, and left.

Conrad Bryne, the "new doctor chap" of Sim's phrase, was new since Sim's last visit to Charles's house. The doctor who always had attended Old Gand had suffered a breakdown and been caused to go away for a year's rest and travel. Conrad Bryne had come, six months ago, to take his place. He had been in to dinner on the previous evening and in the course of it had made some joking remark to Alice in French. Alice had responded

in French; and Charles also joining in, it then had been explained to Sim that, a fluent French speaker, and Charles and Alice fair but "rusty", Conrad Bryne dined regularly once a week when for the fun of the thing only French was spoken; Bryne also, as the conversation then went on to show, was a great chess player, as was Charles, and here, too, by the new doctor's aid, rustiness was being rubbed away. Sim had liked him, a youngish man of not more than thirty, dark, clean-shaven, with something of a navy air about him which was explained when he told Sim, chatting over the cigarettes, that ever since he took his degree he had pursued his profession knocking about the world in liners or as a ship's doctor. It seemed from the way he spoke that he had some private means and need not tie himself; this was his first home practice "and I am rather enjoying a settled spell for a bit" he had said, "not too much to do and some good friends" and he had smiled across the table to Charles who had nodded and smiled back.

Charles seemed indeed to have struck up quite a friendship with the new doctor, and when, returning to the telephone, he had left Sim with Alice again, it was on this fact that Sim, but not immediately, remarked. On the closing of the door his immediate words, resuming those on which the door had opened, were, "Now, Alice, what were you saying just now when Charles came in?"

She put out a hand, the palm towards him, signalling cessation. "No, no; it was nothing, Sim."

He playfully mocked her. "Yes, yes, it was something. You had something to say to me. You wouldn't have said 'Oh, Sim,' like that if you had not."

She said entreatingly, "Please, nothing, Sim. Please, another subject."

He did not know how to take her; but he took the real entreaty in her tone and thought to banter it. He put his

hand to his forehead, simulating deep thought. "Another subject! I never can raise one when I want to. Well, then, Bryne."

She stooped to gather some threads that had fallen on the carpet. "Yes, what of Dr. Bryne, Sim?" The stooping seemed to have caused her face to flush a little.

"Why, what I notice, and I am glad, is that Charles seems to have taken a great liking to the man."

She assented very cordially. "He has; they are great friends." She then said, "Why are you glad, Sim?"

"Why, because I think it is good for old Charles to have a pal. He hasn't many."

She affirmed, "No, not many."

Sim was silent for a few moments. He then said, "He is rather a lonely bird, don't you think, Charles?"

She had been watching Sim while he sat silent. She now responded very quickly, "But, Sim, I am very fond of Charles."

"Why, Alice, of course you are." The challenge in her words was so pronounced and yet was so uncalled for that he laughed at it as one laughs at the capricious indignation of a child. "Now, come, you can't pretend that I was suggesting ——"

She said in the hurried tone in which one, having a charge to lay, skirts the direct issue, "No, no, I am sure you were not;" then came on the flank; "not intentionally, Sim. All the same, in what you said there is an implication; if Charles is lonely, if he strikes you as being lonely, am not I accused of, of neglect — of ——"

"Alice!"

But she persisted, though, still skirting, she modified: "Well, well, of — of letting him be lonely?"

He laughed. "You are a goose, Alice; not a scrap in the world are you accused; not a crumb. Old Charles all his life has had a bit of a sore head. I have always

noticed it; so has Andrew; we have frequently laughed at it. Well, look, Alice, the funny thing with me is that the things I used to laugh at I don't laugh at now. They get me differently somehow." He smiled. "I am doing a bit of thinking now, as I told you, and instead of laughing at them I think about them. Charles is a case. I used to laugh at his sore head; now, somehow, it gets me differently and I see him as lonely. That is what I meant when I used the word."

She smiled. "I like you, Sim, I like having you in the house."

He pantomimed a bow.

She said, "No, no, I am not — what was that expression I liked the other day? — I am not throwing bouquets at you; I just mean it; I just mean that there is something, something very clean about you, Sim."

His eyes in all this showed their familiar quizzing look. "Oh, I have a thorough good wash almost every day," he said.

She waved aside the banter. "Sim, if now you are going to think; going to be — what shall I say? — understanding, you will be more clean, more — helpful." She stopped. Then she said, "Sim, you couldn't, could you, stay here always?"

Her voice, with her question, had suddenly the note of appeal; her question also was in itself surprising to him. His banter left him. "Always, Alice? By jove, always is a long time."

"Sim, but I am serious." Her voice retained its appeal note. "Hasn't Charles spoken to you about, now that you have left the army, coming with him into the business?"

"In a way — yes, in a way."

"He will again. He would like you to. He is fond of you, Sim; much fonder than of Andrew. Sim, if you

did come into the business you could live here. You haven't got a home now. This could be your home. Sim, it would make such a difference, having you here, to — to Charles."

She unmistakably was earnest. He said, "Alice, it is not a thing I could decide straight off, I mean coming into the business. I have only just given up the Army. I want to look around a bit."

"Have you thought about it?"

"It is one of the possibilities, yes; but when I say look round a bit, there is more in making up my mind than — well, more than I can explain."

She said slowly, "I can see you will not."

"But I don't say that. It is a possibility. I might."

She shook her head. "Something tells me you will not. It was a possibility to me your perhaps coming to live here. Something tells me, told me, it would not happen, that you wouldn't."

Her words were a murmur as though, spoken to herself, they but echoed a certitude previously made to herself. She sat up then in her chair and on a new note said "Sim."

He gave her his attention.

"That will not happen. I know it. There is something instead that I want from you, Sim."

He smiled. "The half of my kingdom, Alice."

"No, it is serious. I want a promise, Sim. Just this." She stopped as though hesitant to propose it. Then she said, "I want you to promise me that if ever Charles wanted you you would come to him immediately."

"You don't mean wanted me in the business?"

She shook her head.

"Just wanted to see me? Of course I promise. That is easy."

She said, "I have made it too easy. He might not

ask you. I mean promise to come to him immediately if, if some trouble came on him, some big trouble."

Sim said, "Why, Alice, this does sound serious. Trouble? Is some trouble likely to —— Old Charles . . . ?"

"Sim, I only want your promise."

"But, Alice, you must tell me. Trouble? Sickness, do you mean? Business? Is he ill? Worried?"

She brought her hands together on her knee and tightly clasped them. "No, no; nothing of that, nothing whatever. I said I had made this too easy; now I have taken it too far. Listen, Sim. This is a chance to talk to you and perhaps I will not get another chance and I want this chance. Just only listen, Sim. I told you just now that I am very fond of Charles, didn't I?"

He nodded.

"Well, it is that. You know how it is about a man making his Will; they say that when, putting it off, he does it at last, he feels immensely happy, pleased with himself, satisfied that whatever may happen now he has left everything settled. Well, this — this is my Will that I want to make. I am not going to die, so far as I know, but I am fond of Charles and I do want to know — I have been thinking about it lately — I do want to feel, to know, that if ever he wanted help, was in bad trouble, like, just for example, anything happening to me, you would go to him, at once." She stopped.

Sim said immediately, "Of course I promise, Alice."

She lay back in her chair and faintly smiled at him; conveying to him by all her attitude precisely, and only, the simile she had drawn — that of one relieved, made happy, assured, by having, at last, made a Will.

He smiled return and said again, "Of course I promise, Alice." He got up and went over to her. "Now just fancy you worrying about old Charles, and what he will do if anything ever happens to you, like that!" He

touched her face and she put up her hands and patted his hand. " You are a good little soul, you know. That is how I have always thought of you, one of the good ones."

She seemed to flinch. " Ah, don't say good, Sim."

" Real good."

She pressed his hand against her cheek. She said aloud, " But, Sim, it has been serious, hasn't it? First that you remember always that I am fond of Charles; second that if ever he should be in trouble——"

" Remembered by heart; promised by oath; Sim Paris, his mark."

He bent and made as it were a sign upon her forehead with his finger.

She caught her breath, " Oh, Sim."

CHAPTER XI

ALICE (II)

CHARLES'S wife that night scarcely exchanged words with Conrad Bryne. The young doctor, Charles's new friend, arrived while she was at picquet with Sim; and Charles, who had been looking on, went out to greet him and took him straight into the dining-room where was set out the chess-board. He left in a hurry, having a case to call in at before he went home, he said; no more than looked in on the card-players; announced that he would just take a peep at the patient upstairs; came down with "Dozing quietly, all well;" and then with "Well, I will be round in the morning, Mrs. Paris," was gone.

The picquet had finished. Outside was the sound of the starting of the doctor's car, Charles with him. "Coming again tomorrow, is he?" said Sim. "He seems to attend Old Gand much oftener than the other chap did; what was his name?"

Alice was across the room, setting the cards in a drawer. "Blake," she said. She made no comment.

Charles came in.

Sim said, "Ah, old man; let's see, I am coming up with you for a day in town when you go to office tomorrow. What hideous hour did you say?"

"Nine-five from the station, quarter to nine from here, eight-fifteen breakfast."

"Like a book! Right, I'll stagger down eight-fifteen on the tick. How did the chess go, Charles?"

Charles rubbed his hands together. He was more animated than was his wont. "I won; two out of three."

" Good on you. He is a nice chap, that doctor; I like him."

" Oh, he is a good fellow, yes; we are great friends."

" Attentive too — at his job, I mean; comes pretty well every day, doesn't he?"

" Every second day. Oh, yes, he is keen."

" He must be. You would have thought that seeing Old Gand quite O.K. just now he wouldn't have wanted to come tomorrow."

Alice said, " Well, I am going to bed. It is bedtime, I think."

She had heard the result of the chess; nevertheless she asked it of Conrad Bryne when on the morrow he came to his patient. He was shown in to her in the morning-room. When the maid had closed the door, " I scarcely got a word with you last night," he said.

They had conventionally greeted at his entry. She now was standing facing him and at his remark she returned no words but made with her hands a little outward gesture. " What would you? " it might have said.

He stood looking at her. Dr. Blake, who had not shown himself so attentive in visits here as this his locumtenens, always went his rounds punctiliously tail-coated and silk-hatted. Conrad Bryne, who had left a hard felt hat in the hall, wore a blue suit, the jacket cut reefer fashion, contributing perhaps to the navy air he had about him. He was strongly built, deep-chested, his arms long and their wrists and hands noticeably powerful; his face, with no soft contours, was of the chiselled sort, the eyes set deep, the mouth long and firmly chinned, his hair a little grey at the temples. He was to be noted, seen in repose, as the type that breathes deeply, giving, with strength of figure and of face and with steadiness of eye (as had he) the impression of much force of character, much strength of purpose. Natheless, though in

repose now as he stood and looked upon the wife of Charles, his breathing was not deep but quick; the expression of his mouth not firm but emotional; of his eyes not calm but speaking.

Her own eyes, fixed on his, also were speaking.

She took her breath on a sharp catch. It was as though the thoughts she read within his eyes, mingling with those she knew he read in hers, caused an emotion that, mounting, choked her. But her words, to cover perhaps a signal he might take from that catch at her breath, were conventional. "Who won the chess?"

"He did."

Conrad Bryne paused and then he added, "He wouldn't have. I let him."

"Why did you let him?"

A space before she had answered question of his, also relating to the previous evening, by gesture. It now was he who gestured and his motion was the same as hers had been, an outward turning of his hands. Hers, replying to why they had not talked, was "What would you?" and it was code, done in that understanding, swift, infinitely delicate, grievously perilous, which those in the relations of these two have for "How can we speak when we are watched?" His now, replying to why had he let Charles win, was "How could I other?"; and in the code-book she read, "I am terribly wronging that man; how can I bear to triumph over him?"

Again she caught her breath. She had an infirmity in the fate which (using the common speciousness) she told herself had come upon her. Here was the fire with which she was playing; and she was at base too virtuous to be able to warm her desires at it without suffering pang for the man she was deceiving. The like infirmity was Conrad Bryne's. Here was the reason that brought him to this house; and he was at base too upright to be able

to foster his passion for her without suffering pang for the man he was betraying.

Wrong — if falseness to honour may be called wrong in an age that holds right and wrong to be but arbitrary standards, self-determination the only principle of conduct — demands a bolder front than such.

"We had better go upstairs," she said.

Upstairs, "Patient is well this morning," Swiss Jule greets them.

Swiss Jule's voice — when he does speak — is entirely without tone, expressionless. He speaks — when he does speak — in no kind of exclamation or explanation, but in plain and undecorated statements; and he speaks them as if he were reciting from a paper bald announcements in which he personally has neither part nor interest.

"Patient has been in conversation ever since breakfast."

"Not spoken, has he?" inquires Conrad Bryne.

Patient at rare intervals is known to make a few words, but the question is perfunctory; but the sailor in this doctor gives even his perfunctory remarks a sturdy ring; he knows what Alice and Charles think of Swiss Jule; but for his own part he just takes Swiss Jule as one of the slow, dull sort and always has a fresh, encouraging way towards him. "Not spoken, has he?"

"Patient has not spoken."

"Understands well as ever?"

"Patient perfectly understands."

"Maintains the interest?"

"Patient will listen by the hour."

"How you find things to say to him!" comes murmur of Charles's wife.

Conrad Bryne has crossed to the table where lies the nursing-chart and has taken it up and is deep in it.

Charles's wife has met Swiss Jule's eyes, has felt the silence, and to break it has given the sound of a little laugh and of that murmured sentence, "How you find things to say to him!"

Swiss Jule smooths back a wisp of hair from Patient's brow and looking down addresses Patient. "There is plenty to say. Patient is interested in everything that goes on in the house, isn't Patient? Patient heard Doctor's arrival, and would know what kept him so long downstairs, wouldn't Patient?"

Conrad Bryne has done with the chart and lays it down and comes towards them. "Eh, what's that?" says Conrad Bryne.

Swiss Jule's eyes with his question to Patient have lifted up to the eyes of Charles's wife (who hers averts). His eyes go now to Conrad Bryne. "Patient is pleased, I am telling Mrs. Paris, by the greater frequency of your visits, Doctor, than of Dr. Blake's. Patient would have me tell you that he has noticed it."

Conrad Bryne, the sailor, takes face-values, and at the face-value of this is pleased and laughs. "More time on my hands, perhaps!" He comes to the bed and smiles down genially on Patient. "Hear that, Mr. Still? More time to waste, what? Have to make the most of where I can earn the dibs, what? Well, how are we feeling today? Pretty fine, what?"

Charles's wife, the woman, looks deeper than face-values, and looking deeper here seems in Swiss Jule's words to find that which causes tinge of colour on her cheeks and makes her look away. Professional whispers now engage the doctor and the attendant. She turns again and looks upon the subject of their whispers lying upon the bed.

Remotely crouched away behind those bars that are his wasted body, Old Gand, not Patient, dimly is discernible

by Charles's wife. Of what is he thinking while he has received those questions of Swiss Jule about the Doctor's long delay downstairs? What has Swiss Jule been saying to him? What to Swiss Jule have those eyes in reply been saying? Dimly within those clouded orbs of his the wife of Charles perceives him as of old she knew him, the power, the autocrat; his lower lip has fallen away from his teeth, and dimly in that sardonic, sulky twist it has, she can perceive him as she has been told of him of old, the dragon and the mighty one. His eyes are moving! Most awfully slowly, laboriously, they move from Jule, laboriously crawl along to Conrad Bryne and fix on him and settle there. What thinking?

Conrad Bryne, receiving Jule's report, while he listens and questions is touching Old Gand here and there; inserts a finger down the neck of his sleeping-suit; rests fingers on his wrist; slightly raises a hand and lets it drop; touches the forehead; twists between finger and thumb a wisp of the grizzled hair; with the back of his knuckles nonchalantly presses up the corner of the drooping, sulky lip and lets it fall, sardonic, sulky, back again; traces a finger down a huge blue vein that lies upon rather than within the shrivelled throat; presses the sulky lip again and suffers it again to fall.

It is, as Sim has said to her, all rather horrible; Old Gand might be a corpse. But Old Gand is not a corpse. Patient is a corpse; Patient receives these indignities mute, indifferent, imperturbable as death; Old Gand, no corpse though crouched unfathomably deep within a corpse, is here, is watching Conrad with those dull, unfathomable orbs; is thinking — what?

A small shudder takes her. . . . "The bedsore spot is healed" comes Jule's voice, and she is returned to that going on between the doctor and the nurse of him upon the bed.

"Will you care to look?"

The words are a question, but Swiss Jule's toneless voice delivers them void of interrogation, a toneless statement only; and to emit them his mouth, a thin dark line upon the olive face, seems scarcely to open, his lips do not appear to move at all. His process of articulation always is like that; it always is to Charles's wife as though the portals of his speech, gates of a sinister and evil fortress, are raised but to let steal away, hush-footed, the members of a false attack, are closed to hide the legions of some secret host he has; and she represses by a stiffening of her shoulders the small shudder that seeks on this new cause to come again.

"Will you care to look?"

"I had better look," says Conrad Bryne.

Swiss Jule — salesman indifferently heaving up a specimen — puts his hands beneath Patient, and Conrad Bryne a hand on Patient's shoulder, and they roll him over, the mighty one, and strip his back, the autocrat, and point and peer, the tyrant, and roll him back and pat him down again, the power and the driving-force!

The back of his head is on the pillow again. His eyes, the wife of Charles observes and shivers, again are awfully slowly moving. They have done with Conrad Bryne; discovered what? They now, laboriously and awfully slow, are seeking (well she knows it) her.

She would move, move her gaze or her station, but those eyes are Old Gand's eyes, commanding her (she knows) to wait there; and as in a nightmare, leaden, incapable, terrified, she watches them most awfully slowly crawl towards her. They reach her, fix her, settle down upon her.

She tries to smile. She cannot. She is aware, perfectly aware though she cannot see it, that Swiss Jule is looking at her, studying and perfectly well understanding

the ordeal she is going through. The eyes are on her; knowing what?

She makes an effort; she puts out a hand between those eyes and hers and turns it this way and that as though examining something upon it; behind its shield she averts at last her gaze, and it is then Swiss Jule's look she meets, the look that has that glimmer at the corners of the mouth, and tonelessly he says to her, "Patient is wonderful, is he not? Patient understands everything that is going on."

It is over. They leave the room and come downstairs.

The stairs in that big, Victorian house were wide and they trod down together. "I dread that room," Alice said, and spoke the words on the emotional catch that was the set-back of the strain she had been undergoing.

Conrad Bryne's hand hanging beside hers took hers and pressed it. "I know you do."

They went to the drawing-room. The door was ajar and he pushed it open for her and followed her in.

"I hate to hear you say there is anything you dread. I hate that in all the world there should be anything to give you unhappiness. That is how I think of you."

She averted her eyes. "He is a spy, that Jule."

"What can he possibly have to spy on?"

"He knows what there is between us."

He gave an exclamation, a sound as though control were leaving him. She was turned away from him, standing with him in the middle of the room. He put his hand about her elbow. "You say he knows what is between us. By God," his voice was trembling. "By God, he knows more than I do. What is there between us?"

She turned towards him and gave him swimming eyes. "Oh, how can you ask?"

He said, his voice not trembling now but immensely deep, making within her chords to vibrate, " What has there ever been between us that anyone might not see? "

" Oh, how can you ask? "

He said, " There has been nothing. Looks, thoughts, secret understandings, what has there been to see in these? There scarcely have been words that all the household might not hear. Only thoughts. Alice, I can go on on thoughts alone no longer."

He caught her hands. " Alice, there shall be, there must be, things between us that others, by our fate, must not see; there shall, there must be, words between us that others may not hear. There shall and must be — now. I love you; I love you."

A falter from her lips said, " Oh, this is terrible."

He caught her to him, his arms about her, his face alight with adoration bent to hers, his voice impassioned. " Oh, terrible only in the immensity of my love. I love you; I love you. I have fought against it. I have held out my hands to the things that stand between us, to what they call honour, to what they call right, and begged them defeat me and overcome me. Alice, in the night, night upon night, I literally have stretched out my arms into the darkness and besought the powers of these things to stop my heart, to stop my love, to call upon everything that is sacred in me to join them and defeat me and help me tear you from my life and help me go away; and in the morning, always, I have gone to my beloved and my darling for one more look ——"

" Oh, terrible," her murmur came.

" And I have seen my lovely darling, seen my darling dear; and I have known that nothing in me is sacred, that nothing to me in all the world is sacred, but only she, but only you, beloved."

Her eyes were almost closed; her head hung slightly

back; the weight almost of all her body was upon his arms; almost she seemed swooned.

He said, "Now, now, there have been things between us which others may not hear; my heart that would have burst within me otherwise is welling now on you, on you. Oh, Alice, how do these things happen? I had known you weeks. I thought nothing of you. There suddenly was a night here in this very room after dinner when I looked up and saw you with half the lamplight, half the shadow on your face. God, how do these things happen?"

"Why do they happen?" came her voice.

He cried with an intensity greater suddenly than yet his voice had had: "Because of love; because love knows its own and seeks its own, and finds through every obstacle its own and — Alice, listen to me."

He stopped; she was commanded, and she breathed, "Oh, what?"

"Open your eyes."

She opened them. As if her eyelids had been veils which, lifted, for the first time revealed her fully to him, he breathed, "Oh, Alice!"

He said, "And it has happened because love through every obstacle must join its own."

He put his mouth on hers.

"Return my kiss."

He felt her lips just move.

"Say that you love me. I must hear it. Say 'I love you'!"

Her whisper came, "I dare not."

"Oh, say it."

She gave a broken sound. "I dare not say I love you." She gave a sound of laugh that broke a sob or sob that broke a laugh. "I will say it in French."

"In French then."

Her hands while he held her had been upon his elbows. She put her arms suddenly about him in clasp the equal of his own. She cried with drawn-out bliss of utterance upon the intimate and passionate "Thee":

"Je t'aime! Je t'aime!"

CHAPTER XII

SIM

Sim after eight days moved on from his stay with Charles to stay with Andrew.

"Well, we don't seem to have done much in your visit," was Charles's opening of their last passage together.

This was at Cannon Street Station. Sim had come up by Charles's usual morning train and the brothers' farewell exchanges were thus opened by Charles as they stood waiting for the taxi that was to carry Sim to Andrew's house in Mayfair Street.

Charles had scarcely spoken at breakfast and on the journey up only once. "Don't you want a paper?" he then had asked, coming forward suddenly from behind his own and gesturing offer of it to Sim who sat opposite.

Sim smiled and shook his head, and his smiling refusal defeated in Charles the impulse on which he had spoken. The impulse was regret at his surliness towards Sim at breakfast and indeed, as he well knew, almost throughout his visit; its defeat was done by the refusal of the newspaper exemplifying in Sim that very attitude of his which had caused the surliness. Charles would as soon have thought of getting into his morning train without his trousers as of getting in without his morning paper; it annoyed him that Sim, in this as in every other way, should be so different from himself; and it particularly annoyed him because it was of a part with that indifference towards his future prospects which Charles thought both amazing and maddening. More than any other man, a man in Sim's position, out of a job, ought to be keenly

following the news of the day, seeking opportunities, consulting advertisements.

"I know you never take much interest in affairs," said Charles, speaking coldly, and intending to speak coldly, "but I thought you never could go a day of your life without the *Sportsman*?"

Again Sim smiled. "I had to out in the war and now I have lost the habit. Another thing" — the smile faded —"the names are all different now; the footer teams and all that, one used to know them all; now they are all new to me."

Their train overtook and noisily ran past another also city-bound, its every carriage filled with city workers. When they were past it and the noise lessened Sim added a statement to his explanation. "And anyway I have somehow lost touch with all that, Charles," he said.

In his words, in his tone and in his face was a wistfulness. Charles if he noticed it disregarded it. "Well, there are more useful papers than the *Sportsman,* you will find — or ought to. I will bet you you are the only person in this train or in that one we just passed who hasn't got a newspaper. Every single soul in that one was behind a paper."

"I know," Sim said. "I was thinking of it as we ran by and thinking much the same thing all the time as we have been coming up."

"Thinking of what?"

Their train ran through a station, the up-platform densely black with waiting passengers, their faces a pallid, continuous line upon the black. Sim gestured with his hand in further illustration. "Why of all those thousands of people swarming up like this every morning of their lives, swarming back every night."

His eyes that had been wistful now were abstracted as though he pondered.

Charles asked, "Well, what about them?"

The abstraction seemed to deepen. "Why, I wonder what on earth they think they are doing with their lives, Charles."

Charles said pointedly, and meant to be pointed, "Some of us have to work for our living, you know."

"Yes, but *doing,* Charles?"

The train ran into a short tunnel. When they emerged from it Charles saw that Sim had retired from his forward pose of their conversation and was leaning back against the cushions. He had not waited for answer to his question but it was clear to Charles that he still was deeply pondering it; and Charles, who had ready an incisive retort, reserved it and betook himself again into his newspaper. He had emerged from it with the impulse to make amends to Sim; he went back into it newly aggrieved.

"Sim's fault," he told himself; but still there stirred in him his constant wishing that he could be genial with Sim, and still there rankled against the wish his constant feeling of grievance; and again, when next they spoke, waiting in the station roadway for the taxi that was to take Sim to Andrew, the attempt to be genial ended in defeat by sense of grievance.

"Well, we don't seem to have done much in your visit."

Sim's thoughtful abstraction had lasted right till now. With Charles's words he came out of it, as a man stepping alertly out of a blank doorway. "Oh, it has been jolly, Charles; jolly seeing you and Alice again; I have enjoyed it."

"I meant done much towards getting you fixed in any plans, even towards discussing them. What *are* you going to do, Sim?"

The gay, careless laugh: "I'm dashed if I know;"

and at the lightness at once as always defeat in Charles of the impulse to be kind. "You have never even told me what you have got, what means you have? What is your retired pay, Sim?"

"Far as I can make out, a hundred and fifty."

The careless estimate, as the careless attitude towards so meagre a sum, annoyed Charles. "Far as you can make out? Sim, you surely must know?"

"Not exactly, yet. There are odds and ends, some off, some on. When all's done I reckon I can count on £150 cold."

Charles bit a lip. "You are likely to find it cold, I should imagine, on that."

Sim laughed. "That is rather witty, Charles. Feel the draught, you mean?"

"Nowadays and with your tastes, yes."

The pensive look that they had shown in the train replaced the laughter in Sim's eyes. "As to the tastes," he said, "I can cut them out. In fact, I have. They have slipped away somehow."

His voice had changed in consonance with his expression. "They have slipped away somehow." He spoke it slowly as though he wondered why or how they had slipped away.

Charles regarded him. "There is something up with you, Sim. I can't think what it is. You have changed somehow."

"They all are telling me that."

"Well, what is it?"

"I don't know."

"This was madness, this chucking the service. Don't go away saying I haven't offered to help you. I have suggested the business. I offer it definitely now. Will you come into the business?"

Sim shook his head. "It is jolly good of you, Charles.

No; I have thought it over. It is not what I want. It is not what I am looking for."

"What are you looking for?"

"I don't know."

Charles gave a short whistle, expressive of, and meant to express, his irritation. "Whew-ew! Well, here's your taxi."

The cab drew up; Sim followed his baggage aboard; and through the window the brothers exchanged good-byes; a chilly "Remember me to Andrew," and Sim's responsive "Rather, old man." But as the engine of the taxi began to work up Charles could not repress the shaft of his irritated whistle, and used for it the retort from which he had refrained as their train ran through the tunnel. "I will just tell you one thing, Sim," he said, "if you don't mind. You said coming up in the train that you wondered what all those people, up and down every day, thought they were doing with their lives. I submit to you that, working at jobs, they might with a good deal more reason ask you what you think you are doing with yours."

The cab moved away. Trouble now was in the eyes that regarded Charles from it. "I know, old man," Sim said.

CHAPTER XIII

ANDREW

ANDREW'S house in Mayfair Street, where now Sim came, was No. 26. Twelve houses stood on each side of it; it faced across the way the middle house of the row opposite; and the position thus held had the distinction (on the authority of Mr. Basil Bampton) of being within a few feet of the precise centre of the heart of Mayfair. Mr. Basil Bampton — if any should not have heard of him — was a gentleman well known to newspaper readers by his ceaseless flow of letters on the geography of London, his assiduity in this respect causing it to be commonly supposed that he spent the whole of his days in moving about the streets of London, crouching or on all-fours, with a theodolite, a chain-measure and a foot-rule, and the whole of his nights in tabulating his measurements and communicating them in the form of Letters to the Editor to the London Press. His theodolite, his chain-measure and his foot-rule were staking out Mayfair shortly before Andrew Paris there took up residence; their results, as set out in a letter, were that "in ordinary parlance therefore, Mayfair Street may be termed 'the heart of Mayfair'; and, in terms of precision, the exact centre of a line drawn from the exact centre of the foot of the doorway of No 26 to the exact centre of the foot of the doorway of No 13 is the exact centre of that eminently exclusive and aristocratic neighbourhood;" and the results of these results were that the agents for the lease of No. 26 (then vacant) added a

handsome increase to the premium demanded of prospective occupiers.

"Admittedly," said the principal of the firm interviewed by Andrew Paris, "admittedly the figure is high, but the position is absolutely unique; the exact centre of the exact heart of Mayfair." He put forward a newspaper cutting neatly pasted on a sheet of paper. "Perhaps you have seen this most interesting letter which appeared lately in the papers?"

Andrew Paris disregarded the offer. "It suits me," he said in his stern way, no response whatsoever in his manner to the amiable fawnings of the agent; "it suits me; I will take it; give me a pen, will you?"

The lovely creature, exquisitely dressed, who sat at the table beside him, Linda, his newly-married bride, smote together the palms of her white-kidded hands in silent clapping and radiantly beamed upon him. The agent, who was awed by Andrew and ravished by Linda, thought he had never seen so swiftly remarkable a change in a face as the responsive smile with which Andrew, taking up the pen, replied to Linda's. His thought was "Talk about worship! I would say that lovely thing could have the eyes out of that man for the asking."

He was right.

The rent, in common with all the houses in Mayfair Street, was, as the premium, very high, but Andrew could well afford it. He then had been only a few years in Lord Staverton's service but his salary was commensurate to his services; and Lord Staverton, whose invested interests were such that, without moving hand or giving thought, each revolution of the sun automatically added to his wealth a princely increase, counted Andrew Paris the most valuable thing he had touched in his career. At the very outset Andrew had named, and received, for the position he sought £2,000 a year; as Lord Staver-

ton realised his worth it had steadily risen; when he announced his forthcoming marriage the great financial magnate's reply had been increase by an addition which caused even Andrew himself, who knew his value, surprise, and led him in his expressions of thanks to say so.

"It is a small fraction, Paris, of what you save me," Lord Staverton said.

Andrew knew that to be true; and dispassionately the two men, temperamental counterparts, turned to other business.

It was not chance, it was calculated design — of Andrew's — that first had brought them together; and it was significant of the affinity of temperament which each recognised in the other that Andrew, in a tone as that in which one might pass the time of day, told Lord Staverton at the very moment of his engagement how he had conceived and how he had carried out the design of entering his service.

That very old man Old Gand, that autocrat of the lives and destinies of his great-nephews, had sent Andrew from school to Oxford and the Bar. In his University career Andrew, developing political leanings and a literary aptitude, very prominent in the Union and in circles which touched it, came to stand markedly high in a set to divers members of which were extended from Westminster and from Fleet Street hands influential in the two callings thereby connoted. Established in chambers in the Temple, his Bar reading was desultory, his literary works, in a high field of journalism and attached to a political review of standing, were of note and were noted. People in good places spoke of his articles; he was asked about and he was seen about. When he had been down from Oxford five or six years he was already what he had decided to become, the writer who is called a publicist.

Then he changed his aim.

He desired power and position but he desired them not for what they bring but for what in themselves they are. The distinction was of the very core of his nature. Power and position on the plane that he intended to hold them were not to be had, he determined, as a writer on the newspaper Press; he schemed out a road to them where they stood readymade and he took it. Readymade — he would go where they stood ready for the hand capable of using them, as of old a man of metal to a swordsmith's for a sword; readymade — he would be a great man's great man.

For the operations he planned, involving correspondence with these great ones and with those in whose circles they moved, a good address was essential. He moved from his chambers in the Temple; took a room in Hope Street, Berkeley Square; and set to work with the method and with the resolve which were characteristic of him. First was drawn up by him a list of leading men of affairs, big in the public eye. Their parts and their interests were common knowledge; with this and with works of reference he neatly and narrowly epitomised them in pages of the note-book which opened with the list of their names; then set himself to watch them, and to annotate his summaries of them, through their activities as recorded in the daily papers. He was in circles where, at public dinners, at receptions and the like, he was able to observe them in person; he knew that, by taking thought of friends and of influences, he could, if he set himself to do it, obtain introductions; failing such there was the method of interview by virtue of his journalistic position; that failing, there remained always the method of direct approach on the Hope Street, Berkeley Square, note-paper. His thesis was that these were men alive to possibilities (they owed their positions to the fact) and that he had possibilities to offer them.

That was Andrew's plan and he had but little developed it when it showed him enough to cause him one evening to stab with his pencil the name that stood as "The type I want" at the head of his list.

"Staverton," said Andrew, and with decision struck down his pencil; "that is the man."

He observed that his pencil point had punctured the paper.

"Pricking my chart," he thought.

Another, conceiving the simile, might have smiled. Andrew had with it instead a quick compression of the lips; purpose was the pennant his main flew, not pleasure.

Purpose, youthful, swift, determined, met purpose experienced, ponderous, indomitable, when Andrew, granted an appointment, called to see Lord Staverton. This man, his name not a household word in the sense that Horace Stupendity's, of Stupendity's Super-Stores was a household word, but a household word where the Olympians have their houses, was of middle height, massively built, heavily featured, roughly bearded. He was the type of man one would expect to have a beard and he had the type of beard one would expect that type of man to have, greyish, shortish, roughish. He never, as commonly is the trick of bearded men, put his hand to it. There is much character in the common movements of the hands and it was notable in Lord Staverton that he never, except to do with one something that required to be done, moved his hands. When he walked he carried them, the fingers bunched, in the pockets of his jacket; when he stood his left hand always held the lapel of his coat, his right, the fingers flexed, like a sailor's, pendant and motionless by his side; when he sat — as notably in his chair presiding at his board meetings — he sat straight-backed, forearms along the arms of his chair, hands bunched upon the knobs of their extremities. It was said by

those who had sat with him that he would keep that pose, and his hands like that, throughout the whole sitting of a conference, however protracted; and it was added by them that, as his hands never moved, so also his eyelids never blinked. An academy portrait of him (Scrivener, 1905, now Tate Gallery) thus depicts him. It is an arresting and lifelike piece of work but there is (in one opinion) a presentment of him nearer to popular gaze and (in that opinion) equally or even more to the life. Lardy Quinnet, one of Horace Stupendity's young men and some sort of a connection of Lord Staverton's, declared that he always took off his hat if he happened to catch the eye of one of the lions at the base of the Nelson Column in Trafalgar Square because it was "Staverton in his chair to a tick."

Lardy Quinnet is a facetious and entirely irresponsible young man, but indeed the frontal poise of the lions on their pedestals and of Lord Staverton in his chair are not unlike. Lord Staverton looked on the world, as he looked on his fellow-directors (and as he looked, at their first interview, on Andrew Paris) precisely as those lions look upon the multitude and when he opened his mouth he before now has caused (as would the lions) a considerable portion of the earth to shake. He is chairman of a great banking corporation, chairman of a great insurance corporation, chairman of a great railway corporation; he is chairman of the great firm of engineering contractors which was the foundation of his family's fortune; he has shipping interests, newspaper interests, oil interests, mining interests. His seat is Staverton Park in Westershire (whence he took his title); his town residence is in Carlton House Terrace; he is worth . . . (Andrew Paris, confidential secretary and right-hand man, might be able to compute it roughly; no one else could) and if he never did another stroke of work in his

life his enormous fortune, as has been indicated, still, with each process of the sun, would increase, turning on itself, as does the heavy sleeper, unconscious, turn on his pillow but to sink to slumber deeper yet.

Andrew knew Lardy Quinnet; he knew also a nephew of Lord Staverton's with whom he had been at Oxford; and it happened also that Lord Staverton knew Andrew's name, noticing it as the writer in a weekly review of a series of articles on the economic situation which he had followed with approval. Andrew first wrote to the magnate, mentioning his introductions, his record, and, briefly, his suggestion. He was given an appointment.

Lord Staverton, receiving him at Carlton House Terrace, sat at a study table, upright, hands on the ends of the arms of his chair, eyes steadily upon his visitor. The chair in which, facing him across the table, Andrew sat was the other's duplicate; his poise precisely duplicated the magnate's poise. "That is the type," had been Andrew's thought when, beginning his list of men of affairs, he had written Lord Staverton's name at the head of it. Alert for the right men as are editors for the right story, and as abundantly made free of the wrong, "That is the type," was Lord Staverton's thought as Andrew presented himself and, seated, without embarrassment or preliminary opened his case.

The magnate spoke, after formalities, but twice throughout the interview.

Speaking for the first time, "Confidential secretary?" were his words; "I have two, I have three, in that position already."

Andrew said, "I am not suggesting to you something you already have; I am offering you something different!" and went on.

Lord Staverton, speaking for the second time, said, "Come to me again tomorrow, to lunch, at two;" and

without visible motion of a hand pressed an electric bell-button in the arm of his chair.

Andrew rose, and bowed and left.

As he bowed his mind already was engaged with projects in the office he knew that he had secured. "That is the man," he had said when, pricking his chart, he had stabbed his pencil against Lord Staverton's name; he did not know the fact, but he was perfectly certain of the feeling, that as he reached the end of his "something different," "That is the man" was being said by Lord Staverton.

He came to the interview with chart pricked; he left the house with course buoyed.

Before he had spoken it was his face, and with it all his aspect, that had caused Lord Staverton to murmur within himself, "That is the type." Tall, dark, erect, as he has been described, the long upper lip and the jaw unusually long gave prominence to his mouth as a wide mount gives prominence to a fine engraving; and if an etcher had set himself to make that mouth the doorway of a spirit stern and proud and cold, well he had done his work. No suitor for Andrew's indulgence, and as great man's great man he came to have many, possibly could have read hope in that fine chiselled line across his face; purpose the suitor could read there; and then could read purpose tempered with justice, not justice toned with mercy. Mercy in the face is a lamp, softening stern lines; no lamp stood in the sombre countenance of Andrew Paris; within that strange darkness of his hue — shadow as it seemed of his raven hair — like some cloaked, grim figure in a doorway, only purpose stood.

His face was his fortune. It advanced him, immediately Lord Staverton saw it, towards the position which he sought and in which at the interview on the morrow he was confirmed. He became Lord Staverton's confi-

dential secretary and he became, as he had designed, much more than this. Not right-hand man but a second right hand to the magnate he became; the magnate's chief of staff; groom of the chambers of the magnate's brain; his keeper of the privy purse; his warden of the marches of each and all his enterprises; his keeper of the door; his marshal of audience only through whom the presence might be seen.

"You have to get past Andrew Paris," men who desired the magnate's ear told one another in their clubs and offices and board-rooms. "You have to get past Andrew Paris before you can get near Staverton; and even then you are only as near and only for as long as Duke Paris, as my lord Duke, lets you be. Damn it, the man even opens and censors Staverton's private letters; even Lady Staverton's too, so they say!"

This, touching the private correspondence, doubtless was exaggerated; but by such gossip clearly was evidenced the position that Andrew Paris came to hold. His face — index of his character as Michael's sword was symbol of his power — was his fortune. It obtained him his position; it maintained and enlarged him in his position; and his position, worth, by what it saved the magnate, a fortune to Lord Staverton, was worth, or might have been worth, an actual fortune to Andrew himself.

The parenthesis "or might have been worth" is of profound significance. Set in the present tense, "or might be worth a fortune", it was voiced frequently by men who, had Andrew's position been theirs, a fortune would have made in it. What they meant was that, well as no doubt he was paid, he had beside his hand sheer gold mines from which, by the mere outreaching of his hand, he could help himself and none the wiser. Groom of the chambers of Lord Staverton's brain, he was — here lay the gold mines — repository of that form of knowl-

edge which in the markets of the world, as indeed in every field of achievement, is of a price above all other knowledge; knowledge in advance. He could have used it, every time a Staverton deal was going through, by speculating on certainties; he could have used it by giving a hint in quarters where a hint would have been paid for as for rubies.

These things are done. The use by such as Andrew Paris of knowledge in that second degree, the degree of giving a hint, what is it? Entirely upright financial and commercial circles would hold it, so long as the tips were confined to an intimate friend here and there, no more than an act of everyday friendliness. Use of the knowledge in that first degree, by speculating on certainties, what is it? There are circles eminently scrupulous which would regard it as no more than entirely legitimate business. These things are done. The point, touching Andrew Paris, was that to do them no more even could cross his mind than to feather his nest by ways frankly base or criminal could cross his mind. Favours abundant, possibilities abounding, were in his command; he no more was capable of seeing opportunities in them than is an honest man capable of itching palms in the presence of an unguarded till, or a clean man capable of desire in the company of an attractive woman. Andrew Paris even was higher above these things than being morally incapable of them. To be morally superior to a passion may well be no more than negatively or passively to be superior to it, as the well-fed to the savour of new loaves from a baker's shop. Andrew was positively and actively, even absurdly, sensitive in guardianship of the trusts confided in him. His sense of his position, of his responsibilities, was such that, though it was part of his duties to meet interesting people, he was almost ridiculously particular at whose houses he was seen, at whose

tables he sat; almost ungraciously reserved in showing pleasure in hospitality received or in responding to common courtesies paid him. He was by virtue of his position immensely sought after; to "get Paris" was considered by those who desired to "get Staverton" as good as, or indeed better than, to get Lord Staverton himself; but the attitude he set himself in this regard was that where he had accepted smiles he would be expected to give smiles; and as his master's servant he felt that smiles, being his master's smiles, were not to be given. To instance a very small point, and yet a point well illustrative of the lengths to which he carried his attitude, he found himself, directly his position and his influence became known, receiving passes to every kind of social show, theatrical first-nights, exhibitions, meetings and the like.

He returned them.

But when he married his wife he found all this not so easy to maintain.

CHAPTER XIV

LINDA (I)

LINDA, Andrew's wife, always caused in Sim whenever after an interval he first saw her again a sense as of catching his breath. It was her beauty that caused it. Her loveliness, and an extraordinary radiance her loveliness had, as if her spirit shone as essence through her lovely flesh, came at him always like a blow, like a sudden and delicious perfume, like the first tingling shock of plunge into the sea; and this her effect upon him was not singular to him alone; all men, and even many women, who met her declared to it. Her beauty dazzled them.

Dazzling was the word invariably applied at least to her toilettes. Of themselves her toilettes demanded it; and, taken with her radiant beauty, there could possibly be for them no other single word than dazzling. On anyone else her frocks, her whole get up, would have been (people said) striking to the point of being "too well dressed." On Linda, however, and for whatever occasion she was costumed, it was the lovely creature's natural skin, natural to her as its astounding blue to the kingfisher, shot by in a gleam that none who has not seen it knows what blue can be, natural as to the bird of paradise its plumes. Even men, who normally never can remember a woman's dress, often would tell one another, in generalisations truly but in generalisations ecstatic, what Linda Paris (as everyone called her) was wearing when last seen; and with the description invariably would go the old joke that lived upon the Linda toilettes. The old joke was to the effect that if you had not seen the dress of Linda Paris now

under discussion you never were likely to; she never had worn it before; she probably never would wear it again.

But dress, and even such as Linda's, is but the wrapping; it was to see herself, the simply lovely thing she was, that caused that almost catching of the breath in Sim and in beholders all. It was her hue, Sim used to think, that, with stir like sudden waft of some delicious fragrance, took one first. Arrived at Mayfair Street, and Linda dazzling in to greet him (they were close friends) he thought that, seeing her thus anew, he never in his life had seen or imagined anyone so exquisitely, gleaming fair. He was right. It was the common judgment. By day from her enchanting face, in her evening toilettes from arms and breasts and shoulders, there positively was a gleam, an aura as it were, that one would think a finger must pass through, and yet feel nothing, before it touched the living, lovely flesh. It was not white; her flesh, her hue, her radiance, deeper and more gleaming was than white can go or gleam. Her hue was golden.

It was while Sim still in the first business of arrival was bantering with this golden creature, renewing the affectionate fun there always was between them, that Andrew appeared to join his greeting ("Niggs, old man, how goes it?"—"Oh, pretty good, Sim;" that rare smile upon the sombre, austere face, flashed and shuttered like sudden light from some strong ship passed, stern and purposeful, by night). Andrew, that black Paris, stood beside this radiant thing, his wife; and there was presented to Sim the striking contrast in the pair, Andrew so vivid black, so gleaming golden she.

It was a contrast that everybody noticed; but it was a contrast never so vivid as when, with no eye there to see, it first had been made. That was when, plighting their troth, Andrew first held her in his arms, caught to his breast within a shadowed room, her face to his. It was, as then

first made, as though he held a lamp of burning gold against his face, as though within the dimness of that room, her father's rather shabby study, his face, passionate in triumph and in adoration, was illuminated, as in a night-piece by the artist's cunning, by some glow of hidden source; as though his sombre face positively was lit by gleaming hers.

That was their contrast physical; their contrast lay as sharp much deeper than in hue. They were, and in conjunction of their wedded lives soon showed themselves to be, extremes, shaped at the poles of Nature's plans. Andrew ran slow; Linda quick; Andrew stood deep in his occasions and marked the waters as they rose or fell about him; Linda afloat, stream-carried, heeding nothing, none. He was purposeful; she purposeless; he solid, one that walked upon his feet; she airy, lightsome, one that went by flits on wings; he was grave, sober, an intense and silent man; she light, gay, a careless and a gleeful sprite. They were extremes; and on that night of their betrothal at the point of their extremes protested their affection. His voice, deep always as his face was dark, almost was terrible in its intensity as he declared his love; her voice, her eyes, her lips, her heart, as she voiced hers, were laughing.

But not so all the time.

She first was laughing; then the deep passion of his voice reverberated in his breast and it was felt by her in all her body (pressed to his) and she was breathing then in sharp, quick catches of her breath, and kissing him with lips that now laughed not but as it were consumed his own.

They call it love.

It is not love. Such passions, Andrew's for Linda, Linda's (at that and at such moments) for Andrew, are passions only, gusts of appetite, inflamed desires, and

nothing have to do with love. It is not love. It is the sex attraction, nothing more; of which to build a craft to dare the marriage main is to put out to sea a pleasure-boat, keelless, unballasted, without a compass, unprovisioned, doomed. Love is not blind, it is all-seeing; passion is blind, its appetite its only guide. Love is a helping and a sharing, giving and forgiving, and in the process welding two indissolubly one. This sex attraction is all taking; a hungry, wolfish thing; a thing that hunts its prey; whose zest depends on chase and on denial until it wearies of the hunt, and then is staled; whose appetite enlarges on that on which it feeds until the surfeit comes and then abhors. It holds — while it attracts. While it attracts it holds as bindingly as love; it then repels.

It has held Andrew Paris to Linda for more than eleven years; in the view of Charles, as has been recorded, and of some other wagging heads, it is a pretty dance she leads him.

Well, let the Charleses say it. This was the chase, this pretty dance that she led Andrew; and that is why, the only person whom he loves and whom he loves with a passion that eats him up like a fox inside him gnawing him, she still is desired of him and why still her lovely form is his pursuit. She is likely for that matter to lead him a pretty dance for all time, as things go; her nimble feet are weariless; she still, after eleven years of it, tantalises him, still leaves with every pace she flits a scent that draws him ravished on; and it is that which, as in their courtship, holds him to the trail.

Her danger is when the scent with which she ravishes him no longer whets his lips; her danger is when, for him, her lovely beauty fades or stales.

Already now he sometimes halts in his pursuit, and ponders; then dashes on again.

CHAPTER XV

LINDA (II)

SIM, more observant on this visit, more susceptible to secret emotions in those about him, sometimes noticed these halted, brooding moments in his brother; one occasion was that of a little dinner-party in the house, another at a little private dance in the house following a dinner. He noticed during his stay how frequent were these little parties, of both kinds; he noticed also on the nights when no guests were entertained how very rarely was an evening spent at home; invariably there was a "show" of some kind to be attended; and he noticed, further, all the costly, carelessly luxurious style in which the house was run — two menservants, two chauffeurs, three cars; things like that; all strikingly different from the régime of Charles's house; all slightly surprising in the Andrew of Sim's accustomed imagination.

But what he had particularly noticed at the dinner party, as at the dance, was the look, suddenly caught, on Andrew's face.

Across the costly table, Linda, supreme, superb, holding all her guests in rattling banter; across the gleaming dancing-floor (the very spacious room which, when they first came to Mayfair Street, Sim remembered had been Andrew's carefully planned study) Linda, exquisitely gowned, exquisitely dancing; across these planes of glowing life and colour he had glanced up and seen Andrew, withdrawn into himself, gloomily regarding them. At the table, set stiffly back in his chair; the chair pushed a little from the table; his plate pushed a little forward from its

place; not eating, not drinking, not following the chaft and rattle; looking at Linda. In the dancing-room, standing, erect, sombre, alone, beside a curtained doorway; not seeming to see the dancing, not seeming to hear the music, not, as were all others, smiling, enjoying: looking at Linda.

Those moments in which Sim thus caught Andrew were Andrew halted in the chase, conning the lovely creature who has led him on thus far, brooding; those moments were the moments that found Andrew deeply plunged within the thought, "How could it ever have happened?"

How? How could it ever have been likely or possible that a girl taken out of the dull, poor, almost straitened surroundings from which he had taken that gleaming creature there, could have sprung into the extravagant, pleasure-seeking, reckless of money or of money's worth child of joy that she at once, on their very honeymoon, became?

How?

That is what Andrew, when he halts, looking at Linda broods upon; that is what, looking back at her as first he knew her, beats him.

At almost the end of the first year of his engagement by Lord Staverton he was visiting with his chief at a great house in Berkshire. The visit was for business, in a pleasant setting, relative to oil interests in Burma. Their host, in the discussion on the second night, mentioned that there was in the village a retired old colonel who had soldiered many years in the district and would be well informed on points that were being raised.

"Get hold of him, Paris," Lord Staverton nodded across to Andrew.

Andrew nodded back. "Tomorrow morning, sir;" and on the morrow called on the man named.

This was Linda's father. Nine months afterwards Andrew married Linda.

Her father was this half-pay colonel in a Berkshire village; her mother was the kind of wife, the Anglo-Indian stamp, a half-pay colonel in a Berkshire village might be expected to have. Linda was one of three sisters and two brothers, the kind of children, well-bred, entirely pocket-moneyless, that retired Anglo-Indians often have. Some of the young people, when Andrew first came to know them, were not out of the schoolroom; all the young people daily enjoyed together a schoolroom tea and there commonly was dripping with the toast, seldom butter. That was the kind of home that Linda's was.

The girls handed down their frocks, as the boys their suits, one to another; and the eldest girl, who was not Linda, had a new frock, homemade or village-made, perhaps once a year. That was the kind of home it was. Every ninepence went as far as a shilling and every half-crown was looked at twice before it was broken. There never was any annual family holiday; visits away to friends, the only changes, were prayed for and schemed for; a local bazaar, or a local garden party or a local dance was an event of the season. It was that kind of home. There was no grumbling, there was no dissatisfaction, they were all apparently content in their lot and enormously high-spirited and full of fun; and the observer would have had right to think, as Andrew would have thought had he troubled about the matter (but the thing was so patent he never gave it heed) that the only possible difficulty about a wife taken from such a home would be her amazement, almost alarm, at the style and the surroundings with which Andrew was able to invest her.

Linda, when Andrew took her from her own surroundings and brought her into his, was very far from either emotion. Into that which he provided for her she ran as

with a joyous shout a child might run to its newly-stocked nursery on its birthday morning, or as a town urchin down the sands to his first bathe on a holiday by the sea; and as the child would leave one toy in haste to try the next; and as the boy, careering in, would splash, then plunge; so tasted she, so toyed and sported, so wildly plunged.

Andrew had planned for this country darling many delights and many surprises that were within the power of his purse, and the effective range of his purse was considerable. She had sampled them all in period less than he imagined she would have delighted over one and, this was the remarkable and slightly disturbing thing, while everything in the new life enchanted her, nothing in any degree caused her surprise. She might, by the way she took to them, from frocks to jewels, from dinners to dances, from furnishings to household staffs, from cars to cards (her own discovery the cards, not his) have been born amongst them and have lived all her life a life impossible without them. Where possibly, disturbed he wondered, could she have got such tastes or, incredibly possessing them, such aptitude in their enjoyment? Where? From her father, that rather too pious old colonel? From her mother, that well preserved, amiable, frugally-managing woman of simple habits? From her friends, that pack of brothers and sisters and their like in the neighbouring houses? From the environment of her upbringing, dripping and handed-down frocks?

Where? In mystery's name where?

It beat him.

First disturbed, then disturbedly seeking causes, Andrew, it was true, had discovered secret depths beneath these placid surfaces of his wife's upbringing — that her father, turned like many of his cloth to piety in his age, had in his youth, made solvent and then cut off by sorely-

tried parents, been caused to exchange from a crack cavalry regiment to a line battalion in India, and possibly had touched her with a profligate strain; that her mother was of an aristocratic spendthrift, wastrel stock and though the only gentle one among them transmitted, perhaps, the moral lapses of her house; that her companions fringed upon great mansions of the local hunting set where luxury was seen and to be envied; that nurture on dripping and remade frocks may cause an atrophy of sense of value, as will a savage use and break a vase of Sèvres as lightly as a mug of clay.

All this, debating it in gathering years, Andrew found out and finding out developed a strong dislike for Linda's parents and her home and all her home's associations. But he had come now, at this time of Sim's visit, to feel that such causes, if they could be causes, were beside the point; and he had almost forgotten them. Where now he never is satisfied, where now he is made often to watch her as Sim had seen him, or to think upon her with that brooding look, is by the flat pictures of her as she was living when he found her and as she now is living; by the flat fact, the incredible contradiction, the contrast amazing and never to have been imagined. That is his wonder. That is what beats him.

Because if, watching her he tells himself, he ever had guessed. . . .

But what in actual fact does beat him, what, when lovely Linda first had him spelled would have beaten the implication of that unfinished thought of his — the thought that if he had known before his marriage what he was to expect there would have been no marriage — what in actual fact does beat him is the ardour of the chase, the passion of desire, the sex attraction; while it lasts.

CHAPTER XVI

ANDREW AND LINDA

THE expression has been used of Andrew that he desired place and power, and that it was characteristic of his temperament so to desire them, not for what they brought, but for what in themselves they were. The distinction may be illustrated by the case of a man who cherishes a rare book, not with the pride of the collector, but with the intellect of the scholar; who has rare books upon his shelves, not for the interest of their rarity but for the interest of their matter, intensified and brought nearer to their author by being in their first state as the author first beheld them.

Place and power were that to Andrew; they were possession, not means to possessions.

Linda's was the case precisely opposite.

If satisfaction in possession may be distinguished from happiness in possession, Andrew had enormously the capacity for satisfaction, not at all the capacity for happiness; Linda the contrary. Andrew set up house by taking the expensive lease of the expensive residence in Mayfair Street and furnishing it expensively, and he did this because a residence of distinction was at once the sign and the necessity of his position; Linda joyously approved and gleefully entered upon her dominion therein and she did this, not because the situation testified to her social position, but because she delighted in every aspect of it and in all that she determined it should contain.

The establishment, equipped and set afoot, gravely satisfied Andrew; Linda it ecstatically thrilled.

It was the field at once, for that which, until he should weary of the chase, beat Andrew.

They had been married less than one year when came an evening when Linda told that she had been "dashing round", fruitlessly, all the day to secure seats for the first-night of a play which was expected to be the event of the theatrical season. "And they are not to be had for love or money," Linda declared. "Sickening!"

Andrew laughed. "That is all you know. I have not an hour ago returned a box."

"Returned a box!" Linda extravagantly gestured mock amazement. "Returned a box! You never have! You couldn't! Who sent it?"

Andrew named a man. "And I wasn't taking any," he said. "Not from that quarter."

She had a trick, done for the amusement of others and always amusing Andrew, of exaggerating trifles into crises and acting them with ludicrous theatricality. They were standing together in her drawing-room and she threw herself into his arms. "Knight of my soul, for goodness' sake why not?"

He laughed and squeezed her. "Because he is out to get in on a big combine Staverton is negotiating."

"Light of my life, why shouldn't the man?"

"No reason at all — if he can and at the right time; but not by any early doors."

"Star of my night, explain!"

Andrew squeezed again and fondly looked down upon the upturned, lovely, laughing face. "Why, idiot, he wants information in advance."

"Well?"

"Well, he doesn't get it; no one does, from me."

"Well?"

"Well, he wants to try to, he wants to stand in well with me; hence the box."

She now had lowered her face from his and with her head bent was twisting a button of his waistcoat. "Well?"

"Well, it is what I was telling you the other day, Linda. I can't afford to let anyone stand in well with me."

She said thoughtfully, still at the button, "You know, Andrew, I think you carry that idea a bit too far. It spoils heaps of fun. This isn't the first time."

He laughed teasingly. "What, still sulky about that party of the Astley's?"

She muttered, "Still sick as mud."

He squeezed again. "You know you are not really. Look, Linda, with the Astleys and with heaps of others it is just this; if we go to people we have got to ask them here to us. Well, I can't be on those terms with every Jack and Jill. I am always being offered things I can't take."

She lifted her head and beamed at him. "You wait till they send 'em to me!"

Dazzling would be the conventional term for the smile with which she gave the words; challenging were the better word; and as challenge — of the kind done for amorous sport — he accepted it, kiss and lively hug the form of his acceptance.

But better yet for her words than challenging was threat. "You wait till they send 'em to me!" Very soon that was what people began to do; and in this its new degree the challenge was presented on a date not many weeks later.

The occasion was much the same — a favour (it was inclusion in a Gold Cup Day party at Ascot) extended from a quarter to be under obligation to which Andrew had his punctilious reasons for objection. He could not in any case himself go to the meeting; he laid it down

when he heard from Linda of the invitation that she should not go in that particular company.

She laughed mischievously. "Well, I am going to!"

He also laughed, fondly. "You bet you're not!"

"You bet I am. Dare me to," and enticingly her eyes dared him.

He loved this. "I dare you to!"

She went.

She did not come down to breakfast that morning and he was occupied in his study till shortly before eleven when suddenly she presented herself to him, in a new Ascot frock, radiant, a vision.

After exchanges — on his side first of admiration of her, then when he heard with whom she was going, of surprised disbelief; on her side of mischief-mounting glee — after these, "But look here," he said; "this is serious. I absolutely don't want it done. I told you why, Linda. I absolutely forb——"

She was in highest spirits. She waved the long gloves she carried and trod a little jig of mischief; "You dared me to! You dared me to!" and she came to rest within a pace of him, nymph, a Circe.

The sex attraction! He caught his breath. "Linda, you infernal little villain!" he said, and he went to take her in his arms.

She thrust out a hand. "Don't touch me! I crush wherever I am touched and I'm worth about a guinea a square inch in this." She braced back her knees and bent forward from her hips towards him and had her lovely face close to him and pouted at him her bewitching mouth. "Only that," she said, and bewitched he kissed her and drew a heavy breath and said, "You witch!"

Here was the challenge between them carried to the touch and he defeated in it; here, and no other where, was that which beat him; and — this was what mattered

— defeated, he was ravished by his defeat; beaten he was stimulated by his beating. She ought not to have gone; he had forbidden it; she had defied him. These should have been thorns but they were delicious thorns, as scratching may be delicious, and it was beneath their rapturous pricking that he thought of her all that day and beneath it that he longed for her return that evening. "I am bewitched by my wife," he thought to himself; and there was in the thought a perversion that ravished him.

Those were early days. If, as their married life matured, this his bewitchment might have staled, these his seduced senses have flagged, there came to whip him up an event which at once stimulated his thralldom and gave to Linda immense enlargement — four dizzying years of it — in the courses that were hers.

The war came.

He went to France. The intoxication of leaving her, martially, dreadfully; the hunger of separation from her; the intoxication of reunion with her on leaves that were as nuptial ecstasies miraculously lived again — these married and enslaved him new to one who, where formerly she had been bud and blossom alike in her beauty and in her attraction for him, now (developed in the forcing house of England in the war) was fruit.

It was easy for Andrew, Lord Staverton regretting but acquiescing, to obtain a commission. He went to France in 1915. At the end of that year, the war then being realised as a business best to be conducted on business principles, the right men in the right places, he was withdrawn from his battalion by the Staverton influence and given a staff appointment in which his organising abilities were likely to be of value, and proved of value. He looked splendid, Linda cried, in his red tabs and brass hat; and, tall straight figure, impressive face, splendid he did look

and felt, and splendidly was treated by his lovely wife, and his leaves became orgies, with no intervals, of fond and fierce delights.

He made use, on these leaves, of what was for him an extraordinary expression: "What's the odds?" He was constitutionally, down to the marrow of his bones, one that always counted the odds, looked for and estimated the chances, took always the long, very long view. In the war, home on leave, he took the short view; did not everybody? What's the odds? Life was short, let it be lived. Hail, Licence, those about to die salute thee!

What's the odds? His one idea, living from leave to leave, from honeymoon to honeymoon, was for Linda to have the best of times, the best of everything, and for him, on the honeymoons, to have her at her most gratified and liveliest and loveliest by having the best of everything with her. She had; he had. It had been a complaint of hers that they did not live up to their income. She had now, in his absences, the run of his income, freely; and freely she ran it. (Her card clubs began in these absences.)

When the war was over Andrew came back, not to a wife different from the wife Linda had been in the other years, but to a woman developed into the woman she long had promised to become and developed, not slowly, with checks, with experience, by stages, with moderation, but in the forcing-house of years unnatural. But when the war was over Linda had returned to her a husband, not different from the husband Andrew formerly had been, but the same, grave, cautious, purposeful as of old. In the war Andrew had been of the war, that staggering upheaval of all normality; but when the war was over he put aside with his khaki the new, the different man that it had caused him to be, and resumed with his black coat the old, the stern, the purposeful that he had always been;

and it was when the war was over, it was in these days now shown, at this time of Sim's visit, that Andrew sometimes halted in his pursuit of Linda.

He halts. He looks at her, across their costly table, across a gleaming dance floor, broodingly, estimatingly.

Then she catches his eye — Sim would see it — and she flashes at him that radiant smile of hers and he is bewitched and he smiles back.

How long?

CHAPTER XVII

ELISABETH (I)

When Sim had been at Charles's house he had been among the streets and places where he had known that Elisabeth to whom solely in all the world, if only he could find her, he felt that he could confide the strange reasons which had caused him to abandon his army career and now to be drifting vaguely in search of — what? He did not know.

If only he could find her!

Charles might know. He had not, somehow, liked to write and ask Charles; but it was easy to ask him, indirectly, when, during his visit, the talk turned on old friends in the neighbourhood.

"And what has become of the Glades?" he had asked.

Charles had stared at him: "Why, you know what happened to old Glade, don't you?" he demanded.

Sim said, "I only read the smallest bit of it in a newspaper some man had out there. It did astonish me; I was sorry about it." He had reasons for a little embarrassment in opening this subject and to cover it he slightly laughed, reminiscently. "Only I hadn't much leisure either for astonishment or regret when I saw that paper, we were in the thick of a push."

Charles responded: "You hadn't much reason, either, for being sorry. Glade got what he deserved."

Sim did not take this up. "It was bad luck on the girl, on his daughter, on Elisabeth," he said.

Charles shrugged.

"What happened to her?"

Charles had not the faintest idea.

Come to Mayfair Street, and in Andrew to another possible source of information, Sim early in his stay put the same question; but he put it, to Andrew, more narrowly to his purpose. What had become of that girl they used to know, Elisabeth Glade?

He had the same answer; Andrew had not a notion.

Sim went yet further. "How do you suppose I could find out?"

"Haven't an earthly," said Andrew.

They were at breakfast and Linda, never out of a conversation at which she was present, and for once present at the early meal, must needs strike in: "Why do you want to find out, Sim?"

"Because I want to know," said Sim. "Yah!"

His exchanges with Linda were always on a note of high raillery; and this "Yah!" was the signal between them of a firm snub or score.

Linda cried, "Not so much of your yah-ing — *yet,* Mr. Cleverboots. Wait till I have done. What is she like, this Elisabeth?"

"Go on with your breakfast," said Sim.

"Is she pretty?"

"Prettier than you, anyway."

"Tush; she couldn't be. Are you in love with her, Sim?"

"Niggs, make your wife eat and not talk so much."

Linda stuck out her fork triumphantly towards Sim. "You are, you are, fiddlededar! Andrew, Sim is in love, *that's* what's the matter with him. *I've* discovered it. He's in love with this Elisabeth creature." She waved the fork in Sim's direction. "He is, he is, fiddlededizz! Look at him blushing!"

Sim, beneath her fire, was slightly red. To cover it, "Niggs, your wife's table manners would make anyone

blush," he said. "She oughtn't to be allowed a fork; she ought to be fed."

Andrew, who never bantered, deep in the *Financial Times,* only grunted.

"All the same," said Linda, returning her fork to her plate and thence to her mouth, "all the same, if the match is desirable — who is her father, this Glade creature?"

"He is dead," said Sim, flatly.

"Oh! Well, we all do that in time, even the best of us; there's no great harm in *that.* If the match is desirable, as I shall make it my business to discover, I shall simply *push* you into it. Every man ought to marry; an unmarried man is a walking crime and ought to be pole-axed; and what you are waiting for goodness only knows."

It was a momentary irritation at her chaff on the subject of Elisabeth that had caused Sim to administer the check of his flat "He is dead"; but Linda's rattle always tempted him and of his admiration of her loveliness he always was quite frank.

"I am waiting, as I have told you before, to find someone as lovely as you."

Linda threw him a kiss.

"There is only one I know," Sim went on, "and she is booked up pretty heavily I should imagine. You are very like her, Linda, I always think; you have the same rattle about you wherever you are as she has on the stage." He named a famous dancer. "I mean Tops Delorme."

"Well, Tops has points," accepted Linda, well enough pleased.

"She has one over you, Linda. It made me laugh when I saw her do it on the stage the other night. She powders her legs."

"That's all right," Linda returned, "I powder mine, don't I, Andrew?"

Andrew behind his paper said gravely, " I have seen you do it."

" Lucky man! " Linda cried. " Isn't he lucky, Sim? "

" Now I am blushing and do blush for you," said Sim. " I am pained and I am going."

He rose and went towards the door. He was glad of the opportunity to close the Elisabeth subject. " I shall not be in to lunch. I have something on."

Linda fired a last shot. " You needn't be mysterious about it. It's looking for Elisabeth, I'll lay the odds."

Sim *was* looking for Elisabeth Glade, not on that morning in particular, but daily; and daily in the almost hopeless and entirely unsatisfactory manner which, having no sort of clue or trace, was the only way possible to him, namely by keeping his eyes open as he went about. He wanted her very much. They had been very good friends, though meeting rarely, in the days before the war. When the war broke out he had been spending much of a six weeks' leave at Charles's house and had seen her frequently and their friendship had developed. The war caused in it a further development. When he went to say goodbye to her " I shall write to you," Elisabeth told him. If there had been no war, if he had been going abroad merely to rejoin his regiment for the customary peace service, it is improbable that, of her own initiative, she ever would have written to him; it is certain that, unasked, she never would have said that she would. Whatever might have been her secret feelings towards him, nothing in the degree of love had passed between them and initiative in correspondence would have had to come from him. Convention was like that before the war.

But those were emotional moments, that first onset and those early months of the war (disruptive not of artificial convention alone but of old, natural laws of intercourse between the sexes). It became among women the vogue,

and was counted a right and patriotic vogue, to be writing letters to a man " out there " ; and the vogue was followed, earnestly, flippantly or loosely according to the mentality and the morals of the writer, by women of all degrees and all ages. Elisabeth in her letters to Sim took advantage of it in the plane of revealing herself, her thoughts on life, her feelings about life, in a degree that certainly she never would have disclosed but for the emotional stress under which life was then being lived. " Not one single word of news in all this," was her conclusion to one letter, " now that I have read it over; and I know it is only news that you can want. It is all ' what life is,' and dreadfully dull and stupid stuff I seem to have made of it; but one does seem to think a lot about life in these frightful days and it is relieving to express it to someone — to inflict it on someone perhaps I ought to say." " I hope you have not minded all this," was another ending, " it was your reference to your mother, and the immense love I know you had for her, that made me write it." And again, " I am almost ashamed to post this. It is all religion and what right have I to talk about religious things to you? "

Sim found himself keeping her letters.

Suddenly her letters stopped.

The war surged on. No man who is being swept along a raging flood; who, always battling, at intervals is desperately struggling in whirlpools, over cataracts; who finds foothold, breathing space, but to be swept from hold again; can give much thought to things upon the bank. Carried on in the tremendous tide of the war, Sim, his letters unanswered, in time found abated in him the sense of disturbance that arose when first Elisabeth's letters ceased; meeting her, as time elapsed, he would have told her frankly that he had " almost " forgotten her.

The change that came to him changed this also. In

those days when, perplexed, distraught, he was asking himself "Why am I spared?" very strongly the memory of her, as revealed in her letters, came back to him. It came to him suddenly; he felt that he would like to write his perplexity to her. It came to him abidingly; he was brought to the time when he had been told, mysteriously but certainly, that he was spared because he was reserved for a special purpose, and he felt that he would like to tell this strange comfort that he had of it to her. It came to him increasingly; he had taken the step of abandoning his career to follow that mysterious career which must be somewhere waiting for him; and the more deeply he plumbed the impossibility of confiding this matter (as he longed to confide it) to someone — Charles, Andrew, Alice, Linda, his only relatives, impossible all — the more he felt that if he could find Elisabeth ——

And suddenly he found her.

"One does seem to think a lot about life in these dreadful days," she had written. It now was his position. He had been interested at the time in what she had said. He now himself was (in his phrase to Alice) "doing a bit of thinking" and it was about life as now he saw it that he thought. "And it is relieving to express it to someone," she had said. That was what he wanted, that relief of telling it to someone.

He found it by accepting one of those chances, in themselves so insignificant, in their determination so portentous, that well we all, alike the most successful and the worst failed, may wonder what might have been if in the smallest things of our record we had reversed the thing we did; not gone where we went; went where we did not go.

CHAPTER XVIII

STUPENDITY'S

THE great Stupendity Reception was the chance that Sim, almost foregoing it, took and had reason to be uncommonly glad. Linda was responsible. He had said he would not go; Linda badgered him into changing his mind and he accompained her. Andrew also was badgered but Andrew was resolute against going; on principle he never, he said, attended what he called "those indiscriminate shows."

"I don't see how on earth you can call it indiscriminate," Linda argued. "Everybody is going to be there."

"That is what indiscriminate means," said Sim.

"You speak when you are spoken to, young man, and not interfere between husband and wife. Andrew, Stupendity has got a Princeling coming, at least Lardy Quinnet swears he has, and chessboards of bishops and barons, and half the cabinet and all the authors and artists. It will be frightfully interesting."

Andrew said fondly: "I am sure it will, Linda; but you know how I feel about getting into crowds like that; anyone can pal up with you in a crowd; that is why I keep out of them; I have to."

He was standing by the fireplace in what used to be "the little morning room," now his study since the big study library had been used for Linda's dances. Linda went to him dramatically and put a hand on his wrist. "Yes, well, about that very thing; now I have *got* you. Listen, nasty little Sim boy, and don't suck your thumbs."

"I'm not sucking my thumbs," said Sim, "I have broken a nail and I—"

"Well, you shouldn't scratch yourself so much. If you have got them you must have brought them with you. Anyway, listen, because here I have *got* him. Andrew, Staverton himself is coming, Lardy told me so this morning, so *there*!"

Andrew put his hand fondly on the hand that held his wrist; those brooding moments came never when his idol beckoned him; he always touched and worshipped then. "It is all right for Staverton," he said. "Who knows him, or whom he chooses to know, is his own affair. But who wants to know him through me is mine; and I watch it. No, you must count me out, Linda."

Linda tossed up her hands in mock disgust. "Very well. Well, I shall get a divorce if this goes on much longer. I shall turn to you, Sim. Can a woman marry her divorced husband's brother? Find out, will you?"

Sim had matter in connection with this affair which he wished to find out on his own account; and driving with Linda to the Stupendity building after dinner it was of her he sought it. "This is all new to me," he said, "this Stupendity boom. Stupendity's had just opened when I was last on leave from India, before the war, and there was fuss enough, heaven knows; but it seems to have gone miles since then."

"It *has*," confirmed Linda, "leagues!" Their car wedged itself firmly into the immense line waiting to set down at the reception and she proceeded to give him some itinerary of the leagues that Stupendity's had gone.

Stupendity's, to edit Linda's rattle and to epitomize facts presented in the handsome volume "The Story of Stupendity's" (free to all customers) written in collaboration by four leading novelists and illustrated in colours by four leading R.A.'s, was the greatest Universal store

not only that the world had ever known but that the world was ever likely to know. The genius of Mr. Horace Stupendity had established it; and just as there has never been a second Napoleon or a second Shakespeare so was there never likely to be a second Stupendity. This remarkable man, though by all precedent he should have been an American, was not an American but an Englishman; similarly his name, Stupendity, suiting so well the mammoth emporium he had founded, could not "of course," people said, be his real name; but as to three syllables of its four it was his real name.

The grandfather of this astonishing man was one Pendity. In his early age this Pendity was a small grocer in a large town in the north of England; in his middle age he was a considerable grocer in the same town; and in his old age, handing on to his son, father of Horace Stupendity, he was a large grocer with large shops in four large towns. The son, inheriting four shops, bequeathed forty shops. The grandson, Horace, inheriting the forty shops — the Pendity Multiple Shops as they were called — waited only for his father's death to do that which not to do was the omen and the amen of his fathers before him. "Don't go to London" was the motto of Pendity grandfather and Pendity son; and acting upon it (it was a superstition), no Pendity Multiple Shop was established nearer to the metropolis than a radius of fifty miles. "Go to London" was the sound of the Whittington bells ever in the ears of the Pendity grandson; and acting upon it, immediately on his father's death he converted the Multiple Shops into a company; sold it; added to the huge profit the interest of wealthy backers; erected the greatest shopping block the world had ever known; advertised it by methods of which the world had never thought; prefixed "Stu" to his name; by deed poll assumed and took the name of Stupendity;

and on a morning never to be forgotten in London, the sky yellow with balloons by day and rainbowed with searchlights and with fireworks by night, withdrew the last of his hoardings and hurled open Stupendity's to an astonished public.

In the first week of the opening of Stupendity's the half of the price of every purchased article up to £1, and ten per cent of the price of every purchased article beyond £1, was returned with the purchase in a bright pink envelope to every purchaser. The public, not only astounded, but by this and by equally startling benefits stupefied and drugged, were drawn into Stupendity's in masses that caused dislocation of the traffic throughout the entire boundaries of inner London and, stupefied and drugged, had continued to be drawn into its doors in equal masses ever since. They were not — it is part of the marvel of the thing — thus drawn into what is called "the shopping centre" of London; they were drawn, to the chagrin of the shops in the shopping centre, out of the shopping centre of London. Horace Stupendity, conceiving (and establishing) Stupendity's unique and unparalleled in every particular upon its foundations, caused its foundations to be dug into the bowels of the earth (four floors deep into those astonished bowels) in a situation also unique and unparalleled. He had first desired the Strand because he had made the astonishing discovery that there was in the whole length of the Strand neither a grocer's shop nor a draper's shop; but as he would have required for his designs the whole length of one side of the Strand and as he could not get the whole length of one side of the Strand he hied him otherwhither to where there not only was no grocer's shop nor no draper's shop but no considerable shop of any sort whatsoever. He hied him to that residential district of London which lies between Edgware Road and Portman

Square, and here, in a great area opportunely come under the hammer, erected he, delving lower than any store had ever delved and leaping higher than any store had ever leapt,

STUPENDITY'S.

The literary work — it is that having regard to the distinction of the novelists who wrote it — from which these facts are taken, tells also of Stupendity Square — that aforetime aristocratic and now (renamed) world-famous square adjoining Stupendity's around which Horace Stupendity trotted one day buying up leases as lesser men, going a journey, buy up magazines; where now are housed the greater part of his assistants; on the green centring which the staff on week-day mornings performs physical exercises (to watch them is counted one of the leading sights of London) under the auspices of the Stupendity Moral, Intellectual and Physical Welfare League, and on Sunday mornings, if fine, assembles for Open-air Service (public attendance cordially invited) under the ministration of the resident Stupendity Chaplain, assisted by eminent divines (every fine Sunday a fine sermon by a fine divine, with loud speaker); and it tells also of Stupendityville that model garden city fourteen miles from London (inspection cordially invited) where are the Stupendity factories, the Stupendity cottage homes and week-end hostels, the Stupendity recreation grounds, halls, institutions, swimming baths and beagles, and the Stupendity Auditorium, sanatorium, crematorium and burial ground; and it tells finally of the many Stupendity Festivals or Receptions, held to commemorate great days or new enterprises, of which this at which Sim and Linda now arrived was, when it happened, to be the greatest and best (they all were).

It was held, this reception, to mark not the inauguration

of a new Stupendity enterprise but, one year after that inauguration, the stupendous success of a Stupendity enterprise. The enterprise was to make the Stupendity Dome (that mammoth Dome compared with which the dome of St. Paul's in a bird's-eye view of London simply is not seen because it does not in any degree compare with it) at once the most popular and the most fashionable restaurant in London. No Universal Store had ever yet had an evening restaurant so Horace Stupendity decided that Stupendity's should have an evening restaurant. It should be, he determined, in three fourths of its capacity the Most Popular Restaurant in London and in one fourth of its capacity the Most Fashionable Restaurant in London. He determined this and therefore, both as regards the popularity of the three fourths and the exclusiveness of the one fourth, it was so. Precisely the same food (but under different names) and precisely the same wines (but in different surroundings) were served in the three fourths as in the one fourth; but the one fourth paid four times more than the three fourths. This arrangement, since both food and wines were of the best, enraptured the palates of the three fourths, flattered the wealth of the one fourth, and poured two streams of profit, one small in individual sums but prodigious in the number of those sums, and the other prodigious in individual sums but few in comparison in the number of those sums, into the coffers of the Stupendity banking account. The Dome, from the very first day, became "the thing." "Dine at the Dome" commanded every hoarding and every motor-omnibus top in London; "Dine at the Dome" walked ceaselessly by night in letters of fire, red, yellow, blue and green alternately, round and round the Dome; and in enormous numbers London obeyed these commands and dined there; and all those notabilities who had dined there, and the very few notabilities who had not dined there, were now bid-

den by Mr. Stupendity to assemble together to celebrate this first anniversary of what the Lord Mayor at a dinner held before the Reception termed "not a long stride *towards* a Brighter London but the achievement of a Brighter London" (loud and prolonged applause).

The whole of the Dome, both as to its three fourths Popular and its one fourth Patrician had been thrown for the reception into one colossal Dome, the actual dome of which had been made to represent the sky, starred with stars of electric light each twinkling separately and all twinkling unceasingly; the floor of which for dancing had been waxed in one place and for refreshment flowed with wine, shivered with ice-cream, and towered with sandwiches in another place. In the centre a fountain, particoloured lights playing upon it, burst into being; on each of the four sides a string band, by turns, burst into music; and on a dais conveniently situated stars of the Opera world at intervals and without fuss or warning burst into song.

Mr. Stupendity received his guests on a circle or plot of blue plush carpet which stood at the head of a highway or turnpike of gold plush carpet up which, their names heralded before them by a crier coated apparently in buff plush carpet, they advanced from the entrance to meet him. The blue plush plot being considerably thicker than the gold plush turnpike, the great majority of guests, tripping over it, advanced towards the extended hand of Mr. Stupendity with a short, eager rush which, taking it as a tribute to his popularity, caused immense gratification to Mr. Stupendity and to the onlookers profound impression at that popularity on the part of those who, not having tripped, did not know the reason of the short eager rush, and very high amusement on the part of those who had tripped and did know.

Masterfully and cordially stopping rushes at the rate

of three a minute, Mr. Stupendity displayed himself to Sim who, after a short fierce fight with Linda had cravenly deserted her on the threshold of the gold plush turnpike, slid round the buff plush crier and rejoined her at the frontiers of the blue plush plot, as a short small man with a round clean-shaven face and a large and completely bald head. He thus was in appearance as unlike the accepted type of a giant and genius of business as it was possible to be; in manner and in mannerism he was, on the other hand, brusque, uncompromising, decisive, electric-swift, more like the accepted type than the most exaggerated of the type in fiction or in drama, and no one better knew this (since daily they encountered it) than the two persons who stood now about him and seemed to be (and were) in attendance upon him.

One of these stood immediately beside and slightly behind the right elbow of Mr. Stupendity and was a young woman, uncommonly attractive in a noticeably demure, Quakerish sort of way, who wore an evening frock of brown silk, had brown hair, brown eyebrows and lashes, brown eyes and a brownish face, and had further, dependent from her waist, a bunch of ivory tablets on which, Mr. Stupendity jerking a word at her, she from time to time made a note. From time to time also she murmured a word in the direction of the ear of Mr. Stupendity; she was known, since Mr. Stupendity never was seen anywhere without her, as Mr. Stupendity's shadow; she was in fact his personal secretary; her name was Miss Marr.

The other attendant upon Mr. Stupendity appeared to have no settled position upon the blue plush plot, as had Miss Marr, nor yet as had she, any settled office or duty thereon. This was a tall, slim and extremely good-looking young man every portion of whose evening dress, from his tie to his shoes, gave the impression of having been built specially for that occasion directly onto his person

by some supreme artist of Savile Row and he occupied his time by moving airily about that semi-circle of the blue plush plot which lay behind a line drawn through the feet of Mr. Stupendity and airily accosting innumerable acquaintances who grouped upon its margins. If in these exercises he found himself by negligence to have crossed the line referred to and thereby to be within range of the tail of the eye of Mr. Stupendity he would remove himself behind that line in exaggerated tip-toe action as though afraid of that eye, causing his friends to laugh; and at every passage across his semi-circular promenade he would take himself to the side of Miss Marr and cheerfully attempt to engage her in a conversation to which she never on one single occasion either by word or smile responded, causing him, singularly enough, not the faintest shade of rebuff in his butterfly-like inconsequence and happiness. His name was Mr. Lardy Quinnet, the connection of Lord Staverton who because of their resemblance to his famous relative always raised his hat to the lions on the Nelson Column in Trafalgar Square. He was so universally known as Lardy that even his letters were frequently addressed to him as Lardy Quinnet, Esq.; but the name was in fact found for him by young women of the staff of Stupendity's who, when he first came in contact with them, termed him "that lahdidah young man."

How he came to be associated with Stupendity's and what was his supposed office on the blue plush plot he himself explained to Sim when, the receptions concluded, the blue plush plot and the gold plush turnpike were rolled up and rolled away by buff plush carpet attendants, and Mr. Stupendity, shadowed by Miss Marr and avoided by Mr. Quinnet, moved about the Dome mingling with his guests.

Sim had met Lardy Quinnet in France during the war. "*Hul*-lo, Sim," Mr. Quinnet, now encountering him, very

heartily greeted him. "Come where the drink runs cold — and free," he next, after their opening exchanges, said; and he presently, freely helping Sim and then himself, was putting to Sim the question which everybody on encountering him put to him.

"Sim, what the dickens have you chucked the Army for?"

The old answer, "Oh, I don't know," said Sim.

"Of course," declared Lardy Quinnet, deftly snapping up a jug of champagne cup from the tray of a hurrying buff plush carpet attendant and replenishing his glass, "Of course I know, old man — is that your jug, sir? It must have slipped into my hand as you went by — of course I know, old man, that really you were court-martialled and hoofed out but ——"

"Not so loud, old man," said Sim, laughing, "I naturally don't want it generally known."

"Right," said Lardy. "Of course not. But what the facts were, *why* you were slugged, *how* they found out your hideous goings-on, I never could discover. You kicked a major in the stomach on parade, didn't you, old man?"

"No, I tripped up a general while he was inspecting us; but don't let us go into that, Lardy. It is naturally painful ——"

"Quite," said Lardy gravely. "Quite. Try one of these smokes, old man. They are good. I nominated them for this show myself."

Sim took a cigarette. "That is what I want to ask you, Lardy, your connection with Stupendity's. I had no idea you were in this game when I met you out there. What department do you serve in, Lardy, gents' hose and headgear?"

"No, ladies' underwear, old man. As a matter of fact, Sim, what I am is, and you have only got to look at me

to see it, what I am is a Brain. I am, old man, from my heels to my head, one living, pulsing, twisting Brain."

"Does it hurt?" inquired Sim.

"Here and there, old man; here and there. It is a terrific thing, I tell you, to be, simply, a Brain. Sometimes when I shave it of a morning or when I put it to bed at night the — awe and the majesty and the responsibility of the thing positively sends me all of a tremble ——" He broke off. "Doesn't it, Miss Marr?" he said.

The little brown shadow, shadowing Mr. Stupendity, had appeared beside them. Mr. Stupendity, engaged in conversation, was a few feet away; his shadow, standing against Sim, gave Lardy Quinnet a cold attention.

"I have no idea what you were talking about, Mr. Quinnet."

"Brain, my very dear Miss Marr."

"I could not conceive a subject you know less of. Will you attend, please?" Her manner was coldly businesslike. "Mr. Stupendity wishes some ideas for a Tool Week in the Ironmongery Department. He desires a complete scheme from each of the Intelligence Staff by mid-day tomorrow. Miss Glade will attend you for yours at 9.30."

Mr. Stupendity had moved on. His shadow immediately followed him.

But Sim had caught eagerly at a name mentioned. "Lardy, Glade did she say? Who is Miss Glade?"

Lardy returned to his glass and to his companion. "I am engaged to that girl," he announced.

Sim had a chill. "To Miss Glade?"

"Glade, no; to Miss Marr."

Sim was surprised. The markedly frigid manner of Miss Marr had not suggested betrothed relations. "By jove, I congratulate you, Lardy. She is uncommonly

pretty. I was noticing her when Stupendity was receiving. But, Lardy ——"

"She's not only pretty," declared Lardy, "she's a marvel, a Living Marvel capital L *and* capital M. I tell you, Sim, that girl ——"

"Lardy, tell me first, half a minute, old man, tell me first about the other girl. Who is this Miss Glade? I used to know ——"

He was to be disappointed. "Haven't an earthly, old man. Sort of idea she's an odd-timer on Miss Marr's typist staff. Miss Marr will tell you if you are interested. She can tell anybody anything, that girl. A Marvel. We'll go and talk to her; I would like you to know my fiancée, you know." He peered across the room. "Ah, she's deep in with the Old Man and some other birds just now. I know them, they'll be half an hour yet. I will just tell you, Sim, what you were asking me, how I am a Brain and how I became a Brain."

He lit a fresh cigarette and proceeded to tell. "You heard what Miss Marr said just now — Intelligence Staff — ideas for some Ironmongery Stunt — fancy that man getting the idea of arranging a Tool Week in the middle of all this racket; he's a wonder, Stupendity, a Living Wonder, capital L *and* capital W; well, to find him ideas and to work out his own ideas he has got what he calls an Intelligence Staff, a Brain Staff, six of us; six living, pulsing, twisting Brains; two female Brains and four male Brains. I'm one."

"Male?" said Sim.

"He-male, old man. He-male with a punch in every lobe. Now how I became a Brain, Sim; how, after the brain-paralysing atmosphere of Eton and Christ Church, I sprang into a fully-charged, central-driven, oil-burning, noiseless, thousand-pulse power Brain; how I did that, Sim ——"

CHAPTER XIX

AUDIENCE OF STUPENDITY

How Lardy Quinnet did that, how he became a Brain on the Intelligence Staff of Stupendity's, since it supplies also illuminating glimpses, not of himself alone, but of Mr. Stupendity, genius, and of Miss Marr, shadow of genius, is worthy the chronicling but should be told, perhaps, in language more susceptible of easy understanding than the free colloquialisms in which Lardy Quinnet now proceeded to communicate it.

It was done, then, some years before, in Mr. Stupendity's private room in the Stupendity building, the genius seated at his massive desk, his shadow seated behind his right elbow and Mr. Quinnet seated immediately before him. The occasion was the reception of Lardy, fresh up from Christ Church, Oxford (the interview accorded him by request of Lord Staverton), for contemplation of the idea of giving him employment; and Mr. Stupendity, contemplating his applicant, decided within a very few minutes that employment, and notably high employment, should be given.

The decision testified to the acumen of this Napoleon of merchandise. A lesser man of Mr. Stupendity's self-made type would have looked with affront and contempt upon the characteristically Eton and Oxford type that Lardy Quinnet presented and would have relegated him, if engaging him at all, to some menial office in which he would have been put through the mill and his airs and graces ground off him. The genius of Mr. Stupendity, on the contrary, immediately had in mind for him not only

a high post, but a post in that topmost grade of his service which he designated his Intelligence Staff. His aim in regard to this Intelligence Staff was to have it present to him ideas from all possible angles of the purchasing-public mind; his genius detected for him in the airs and graces of this elegant and aristocratic young man an angle not at present represented and eminently desirable of representation; he delivered to Lardy, therefore, a short address on the Principles of the House of Stupendity; and he terminated it, surprisingly, by addressing to Lardy the command, "Look at my head, sir, what do you see there?"

Now the head of Mr. Stupendity being, as has been noted, absolutely and entirely bald, nothing whatsoever was to be seen there either by the eyes of Lardy which commanded its front, upper and lateral elevations, or the eyes of Miss Marr which commanded, but they were bent upon her notebook, its rear elevation. Lardy, however, who never was at loss was not here at loss. He had come prepared for this interview. He had that morning received from his mother (who had begged, and obtained, for him the influence of Lord Staverton, her cousin) a letter "enclosing you, darling, this little cutting from the gossip column of 'The Daily Picture' which tells you a lot about what kind of a man Mr. Stupendity is," and adjuring him, "Do do your best to impress him, darling, and *don't* wear that dreadful yellow waistcoat."

It was in the final sentence of the cutting alone that information of practical value appeared to Lardy to lie. "Mr. Stupendity," said the final sentence, "who has been credited by no less an authority than Lord Staverton with being 'Brain, sheer Brain' is, by the way, a devoted reader of the Proverbs;" and Lardy, reading this as he started (in the yellow waistcoat) for the interview, by

happy chance picked up at the railway bookstall a little volume devoting many pages to the only proverbs of which he knew, by name "Wit and Wisdom for all: Puns, Proverbs, Saws and Quips for the Million."

"If I can hurl in a proverb or two," sagaciously had reflected Lardy, "it will establish a jolly feeling and ten to one he will book me."

Praiseworthily therefore he devoted the entire journey to London to committing proverbs to memory, had ever thereafter an astonishing number (though sadly mixed) at his daily disposal; and at that command to look at Mr. Stupendity's head and disclose what he saw there, though utterly failed by any apposite proverb to hurl in at the entire blank thus presented to him, with masterly agility of mind fell back on the other item of intelligence supplied him by the newspaper cutting, the estimate of Mr. Stupendity pronounced by no less an authority than Lord Staverton.

"Look at my head, sir," repeated Mr. Stupendity, concluding his address. "What do you see there?"

"Brain, sir," said Lardy promptly. "Sheer brain."

"Rubbish," said Mr. Stupendity. "You can't see brain." He tapped his head with his forefinger. "Come, sir, what do you see?"

Lardy who in whatever company, whether with an urchin or an Archbishop, was always completely at his ease and who was strengthened here moreover by the opportunity to hurl in a proverb, spoke at once in his quick friendly way. "Well, soft words butter no wrath, or whatever the thing is, sir; and I may as well tell you quite candidly — a nod's as good as a kick to a sow's ear, you know, and all that — tell you quite candidly that I see nothing at all on your head. Fact is you're as bald as a coot, old ma—, sir."

"Correct," said Mr. Stupendity. "What is a coot?"

"Well, I am dashed if I quite know," said Lardy. "Some sort of a billiard ball, I believe."

"Rubbish," said Mr. Stupendity; "it is some sort of an animal. Never use a word unless you know its meaning. Miss Marr, what is a coot?"

Mr. Quinnet who had a roving eye in general for the sex to which Miss Marr belonged, and in particular for the type which Miss Marr in an uncommon degree and in a brown bunny-ish way represented, had had that eye upon her with considerable approval; and he now was very highly impressed by the way in which she, immediately upon the launching of Mr. Stupendity's question, supplied the information it requested. He did not know then what Mr. Stupendity and all Mr. Stupendity's circle knew, namely that Miss Marr knew everything.

"A coot," said Miss Marr, speaking like a dictionary suddenly given voice, and through a toneless and purely formal yet singularly pleasant little voice, "A coot is a small black waterfowl frequenting lakes and still waters."

"In England?" inquired Mr. Stupendity.

He did not turn towards his shadow with this interrogation, nor ever indeed, unless he happened to be facing her at the time, looked at her with any interrogation. He remained fronting towards Lardy Quinnet, projecting his interrogations before him and receiving them, as it were, out of the void, much as a thought-reader, pacing about the auditorium, challenges and accepts the responses of his blindfolded medium on the stage.

"In England?"

"Yes, Mr. Stupendity. The coot's habitat in England is in the south."

"Is a coot bald?"

"A coot's bill," said Miss Marr, expressionless as before and to the mind of Lardy Quinnet in some mysteri-

ous way all the prettier for being expressionless, "A coot's bill is carried back over its forehead in a peculiar and unusual manner and hair naturally does not grow on a bill."

"Naturally," agreed Mr. Stupendity. "Have we any coots in our Livestock Department?"

"No, Mr. Stupendity."

"Let that be rectified at once."

Miss Marr made a note. "Yes, Mr. Stupendity."

"Instruct Mr. Henniker," continued Mr. Stupendity, still speaking into the void from which he drew these responses, and now firing into it without pause a salvo of commands. "Instruct Mr. Henniker to procure a dozen or so of the best coots. Request Mr. Peters to attend before the Intelligence Staff with a rough draft of a Coot Week in the Livestock Department. Instruct Advertising Staff to scheme out possibilities of 'Bald as a Coot' as Coot Week Slogan."

"Yes, Mr. Stupendity;" and pausing the briefest moment to ascertain whether the battery had ceased fire, and finding in that swift moment — so rapid were the mental movements of Mr. Stupendity and so well was his shadow accustomed to them — that they had, Miss Marr added, tonelessly as ever, "At 12.25 you have a surprise visit to the Footwear Department, Mr. Stupendity. It is now 12.21."

Mr. Stupendity immediately arose. Miss Marr, also arising, produced as by a conjuring trick a silk hat which from behind, to the immense admiration of Mr. Quinnet, she popped on to Mr. Stupendity's head as easily and as certainly as if slipping it on to a peg, and followed him towards the door.

"How did this coot business come up?" demanded Mr. Stupendity, walking.

"You called Mr. Quinnet's attention to your baldness,"

replied Miss Marr, walking. "You were about to tell him ——"

"Tell him," said Mr. Stupendity and, the door mysteriously opening as he approached it, swiftly made disappearance through it, whereupon the door as mysteriously reversed its movement and silently closed.

Miss Marr, returning, in a simple movement and with no settling or fuss seated herself in Mr. Stupendity's chair and immediately, without preamble, smile or other intimation, opened upon Lardy: "Mr. Stupendity called your attention to his baldness as an example ——"

"How did that door open and shut like that?" interrupted Lardy.

"By electric treads in the floor as you approach it and leave it."

"Gosh!" said Lardy, moved.

"As an example," proceeded Miss Marr, unmoved, "of the sincerity and resource with which he conducts this House and which you, should he engage you, will ——"

"I say, tell me just one thing more," Lardy again interrupted. "How the dickens did you know all that about coots?"

"By looking in the dictionary whenever I come across a word I don't know and committing it to memory."

"Gosh!" said Lardy, moved.

"Sincerity and resource," proceeded Miss Marr, unmoved, "which you, should he engage you, will be required to emulate."

"To how much?"

"To emulate — to follow, copy, maintain, pursue."

"Quite," said Lardy, staggered.

"Sincerity," proceeded Miss Marr, unstaggered. She flicked out towards Lardy what he considered to be the sweetest little finger of a left hand he ever had seen and ticked it off with a pencil held in what he considered to be

the sweetest little right hand he ever had seen. " Sincerity in this way; no hair restorer ever has restored hair to the head of Mr. Stupendity; Mr. Stupendity cannot therefore in sincerity recommend a hair restorer for anyone else's head; no Stupendity hair restorer therefore is sold in the Toilet Department of this House. Resource." She flicked out towards Lardy a second finger, equally attractive, and applied the pencil to it in its turn. " Resource in this way: by making practical use for the credit and advancement of this House of so everyday a thing as the baldness of his own head."

" A brief pause there, if you don't mind," requested Lardy. " I don't quite get that point. How practical use? "

" The practical use, benefit," explained Miss Marr, " of losing whatever may be lost by not running a hair restorer but gaining what is obviously gained in public confidence by having the courage to say so."

" Sound," approved Lardy, " I get that. But, look here, I bought a flagon of hairstuff in your hairplace not a month ago. The chap fixed it on me when he had the razor over me so I couldn't say no."

" But not a Stupendity hairstuff," corrected Miss Marr. " Our assistants push all staple restorers but inform all clients, on demand, that we do not make a Stupendity restorer because this House only makes what it can personally guarantee. We thus secure the sales on the one hand and the confidence on the other."

" Gosh! " said Lardy, moved.

" Now you must go," said Miss Marr, unmoved.

" Am I booked up for a job? " inquired Lardy.

" Certainly not," replied Miss Marr. " You will attend to-morrow at —" she flicked over a leaf of an engagement pad lying before her and inserted a note upon its crowded surface —" at 11.35. Good morning."

She bent at once over her notebook, checking ab·

sorbedly. The action removed from Lardy's admiring gaze her singularly attractive brunette face and presented to it instead the top of her singularly attractive brown head. He scarcely, however, had realised the charm of this view when he felt the chair in which he sat move ever so gently backwards and outwards and, disturbed by this uncanny phenomenon, and looking around for its possible cause, perceived that the door also was mysteriously opening.

"I say, I'm moving!" said Lardy, perturbed.

"Yes; good morning," murmured Miss Marr, unperturbed.

"Is it a non-stop run?" inquired Lardy, "or do I change anywhere?"

"You change now," murmured Miss Marr, deeply occupied. "It's just a hint."

The chair indeed, having carried Lardy's knees from under the desk to a point convenient for their use, had come to a rest; and Lardy, profoundly impressed, arose and examined it. "All right. I've changed. I say, who issued my ticket for that trip?"

"I did; with my foot."

"Gosh!" said Lardy, moved.

"'Morning," murmured Miss Marr, unmoved.

"Farewell to you," returned Lardy. "How with your foot?"

"On a tread."

"Lucky tread!" said Lardy.

The sound of a little puff, as of amusement, was blown down the nostrils concealed by the bent head.

"You know," said Lardy, encouraged, running his forearm round his silk hat, "you know something tells me — little pictures have long tongues, or whatever the thing is — something tells me that you and I are going to find a very great deal in common."

"You know," said Miss Marr, looking up at last, and speaking clearly, "if it always takes you as long to leave a room as it is doing now you will never suit Mr. Stupendity. I merely give you that as a hint."

"It is most awfully kind and thoughtful of you," responded Lardy. "All that I am telling you meanwhile is that something tells me that you and I are going to be very dear friends."

"And the next day," said Lardy to Sim, arriving at this point in his own version of these occurrences, "old Stupe fitted me up on his Intelligence Staff. That is how I became a Brain, Sim, old man, a living, pulsing, all-grey-matter mass of lobes, and incidentally that is how I met my blushing bride that is to be, love at first snap and all's well that ends in lovers' meetings as the proverb says. Look, they have finished gassing now, come right along and I'll introduce you and she can tell you about this Glade creature you are after." He broke off. "Just half a minute ——"

He dashed for this half-minute to a young man much of his own type thrown up towards them by the ever-moving throng, and high merriment arising between the two, and the half minute appearing likely to develop into a half-hour, Sim, thinking throughout the whole of Lardy's discourse of this possible chance of news of Elisabeth Glade, wound his way alone towards Miss Marr from whom possibly it might be forthcoming.

CHAPTER XX

B. C. D. (I)

He came up with the shadow of Mr. Stupendity at a moment when, the substance standing within a close knot of friends, the shadow was permitted to be standing more or less at ease and, very earnest in his quest, he did not hesitate to speak to it.

"You will forgive me introducing myself, Miss Marr; I am an old friend of Lardy Quinnet's. He has just told me that he is engaged to you. I want to con ——"

"He is nothing of the sort," replied Miss Marr. The words had of themselves a sharp sound and for the moment they took Sim aback. He was quick to detect in them, however, and in the expression of Miss Marr's face as she uttered them, a pretty petulance rather than a sharpness and this was strengthened in him by the words which Miss Marr immediately added. "I have told him so over and over again," added Miss Marr and this time permitted her petulance to melt into a very friendly smile.

It was reasonably clear to Sim that if the two were not officially engaged they in all probability ultimately would be and he assumed a line suitable to the assumption. "Of course Lardy is a licensed idiot," he remarked cheerfully.

"They have no right to license him, whoever does it," returned Miss Marr, now smiling delightfully. "It ought to be revoked and the man shut up. He is simply a goose let loose."

"He told me one thing I should say is true," said Sim; "that you were a Living Marvel. I perceive you are a poet also — a goose let loose goes well."

Miss Marr laughed. "Why, with that for an example, I will grant you more poet than marvel and we will agree on that. You are Major Paris, aren't you?"

"And he told me you know everything," said Sim. "Though how you knew ——"

Miss Marr laughed again. "That was simple. My informant is behind you."

Sim turned and saw radiant Linda. Linda was in process of slow movement within a ring-fence of men, the ring-fence moving with her. An in-post of the fence was at her either elbow engaging her in conversation, the remainder of the fence mutely waited their chance to dash in, dispossess the two in-posts, and became in-posts in their stead.

"Ah, my lovely sister-in-law," said Sim returning his eyes.

"She *is* lovely," agreed Miss Marr.

"But it is not about her, nor yet, to be honest, really to congratulate you — so that wipes out that blunder, doesn't it? — that I came to speak to you. Miss Marr, what I wanted of you is — have you a girl on your staff called Glade?"

"Not on my staff. I wish she were. She is good. Miss Glade is one of my emergency-calls. I get her when I want her, if she is available. What of her, Major Paris?"

"What is she like? What is her Christian name?"

"Dark, slim, pretty — Elisabeth, I think."

Sim had a thrill.

"I used to know her. I want to get in touch with her. Do you know where she lives?"

Miss Marr did not know. "It is funny I don't, but she has got her own line, her own secretarial connection, you know, and whenever she has a spare hour or so — she works *much* too hard, that girl — she rings me up to see

if anything is doing. Of course I easily can find out her address for you. She ——"

Miss Marr's eyes had glanced across the room and her voice went up a scale. "Why, there is a man who will tell you everything. Miss Glade works for him regularly. There, by that woman in red."

Sim very eagerly followed her indication. "That chap! By jove, that's a face I know."

Linda, unperceived, had slipped through her ring-fence, and was beside them; and also had followed Miss Marr's instruction. "*That* face," she joined in. "Well, Sim, you ought to know it. Everybody knows *that* face. It glooms at you from all the bookstalls and half the illustrated papers. *That* face belongs to the author of 'The Road Home.' That's B. C. D. Ash—'B. C. D.' as everyone calls him — the super-famous novelist man."

Sim said, "Well, I'm dashed. I knew him out in France. He was attached to us with some Labour Battalion people; we were rather pals; but I never dreamt of connecting him with all this 'Road Home' fuss; and I knew he was a writer too." He turned to Miss Marr. "And he knows this Miss Glade? This *is* luck. I'm right for him."

He nodded to Miss Marr, smiled at Linda, and set his way quickly towards the famous news that could be had from this super-famous author.

The super-famous novelist was occupied as Sim made towards him in moving about in a very curious manner indeed. He would proceed a few very swift paces in one direction, then start violently, halt abruptly, look agonizingly about him in a very scared way, and then fly off more swift paces at a sharp tangent to his former direction; also he would plant himself rigidly behind some tall and stout person, timidly peer out his head on either side of this person, hurriedly snatch it in again as if someone

had bitten at it; and, the person moving, would be revealed with an expression on his face similar to that of a sea-bather whose tent has been blown away while he is undressed and, with the same expression, would flee behind cover of another tall and stout person. When Sim, tracking him down with the considerable difficulty necessitated by these his mysterious movements, suddenly by a swift-step countered an equally swift side-step on his part and thus stood immediately face to face with him, the super-famous author of "The Road Home" without any form of salutation, though he had not seen Sim for three years, thus very strangely addressed him:

"Stand absolutely still, Sim, will you, like a good chap? Whatever you do don't move your head."

His voice was agitated and low, and his own head he held with such stiffness in the exact line of Sim's that Sim could see the jerky movement of his throat muscles tense beneath the strain.

"Say when," said Sim, mystified but amused.

The head of the super-famous novelist inclined a trembling shade to the right; his eyes, charged with the poignant expression of a beast in a slaughter house, directed themselves over Sim's shoulder. "All right now," he said.

His voice gave to the words the sound of a great amen; the terrible rigidity of his person relaxed; he shuddered violently; and he blew his nose with considerable emotion. "Gosh!" he said; and he then said, relieved: "Hallo, Sim. I say, I am jolly glad to see you again."

"I am jolly glad to see you," Sim returned. "But what is the alarm? Are you hiding from someone?"

The super-famous novelist blew his nose again. "I am always hiding," he said.

He always was. The habitual look of this remarkable man — a youngish-looking man wearing rimless spectacles

— was the look of a man in imminent peril of at any moment being arrested; which, in the considered judgment of the great majority of those literary critics and intellectuals who together form the eminent and redoubtable Bodyguard of the glorious heritage and traditions of English literature, he not only deserved to be but, as they said, if literature were properly appreciated and protected in this country, would have been long ago. It was partly the illustrious novelist's knowledge of this, partly a day to day and terrified ignorance of what newer of his insults to literature had been dragged to light by the Bodyguard, partly a total incapacity to hold his own in the conversation of the circles into which by his fame he had quite unintentionally sprung, and partly many grave defects in the working of the organs of his digestion, that caused him, as he had told Sim, to spend the greater part of his time in hiding; and it was partly because his surname was so insignificantly short, partly because his initials were so impressively long, and partly because, almost alone among authors, his Christian name was neither stated upon his books nor familiar in the mouths of the public, that he was always known, as Linda had said, by his Christian initials " B. C. D."

The primary offence which caused this trogloditish yet universally known individual to warrant arrest was of a double order. It reposed first in the injurious fact that the novel, " The Road Home," which had brought him fame had not brought him fame by order of the Bodyguard (who had indeed either ignored it or perfunctorily dismissed it until they discovered it to be running like a pestilence among the common people); and it reposed secondly in the insulting fact that his novel sold in more hundreds of thousands than any modern novel had hitherto sold or than any novel not written by a member of the Intellectual branch of the Bodyguard, or not issued

under the direct patronage of the Critical branch of the Bodyguard, had any right, reason, excuse, precedent or permission to sell. This was not to be suffered; and the Bodyguard, magnificently alive to the responsibilities of their position as trustees of the noble traditions of the English Novel, did not suffer it. The outrageous sale of this upstart work caused it to be the subject of correspondence in the daily papers and justified it in being the subject of back-fire notices in the critical journals; and in letters contributed to the one and articles contributed to the other the Bodyguard, softened by no false mercy and hardened by all true duty, showed that " The Road Home " on the one hand contained no scintilla of literary merit of any kind whatsoever and on the other, by its unscrupulous sales, not only testified to the debased taste of the common reading public but, by the insidiousness of the trash it purveyed, yet further, if possible, debauched that taste.

This was laudable and worthy work and it so clearly pointed out to the author of " The Road Home " the true nature of the offence he had given that, as he said at the time, though he never had supposed that he had written a good book, it was a revelation to him, when once the Bodyguard began to handle it, how entirely worthless and altogether deplorable a book he had written.

His hour, however, had not yet come; his cup, though full, was not yet filled. The Bodyguard, proud and warm in the knowledge and with the effort of having done what could be done with a book they had missed, now, not again to be caught napping, waited, battleaxes gently swinging, for the publication of the novel that should follow " The Road Home "; and this, under the title of " Forts of Folly ", at length appearing, they with one accord and with a loud and bitter cry rushed upon it and with their choppers chopped it into pieces so exceedingly small and

with the admixture of so much gall (their own gall) and so much blood (the author's blood) as to present in the person of B. C. D. the singular phenomenon of one who, though he had escaped hanging, continued to maintain life after he had, most emphatically and most deservedly, been drawn and quartered.

This then was the record of the man whom Sim now very cheerfully greeted and who with evident sincerity very gladly greeted Sim. "For I have often thought of you, Sim," said B. C. D., "and wished I could run into you again. We rather hit it off, do you remember?"

Sim warmly agreed; reference was made to "uncommon good talks out there"; Sim declared that he now must fall into the general line and call this super-famous friend B. C. D.; B. C. D., assenting, staved off the congratulations of Sim, declaring that he never permitted in his hearing "fame" or "famous" but only "notoriety" and "notorious" and never — it was universally known — would talk about his books; and, these exchanges pleasantly rattled through and concluded, said Sim: "But there is a thing I particularly want of you, B. C. D. You have a secretary, haven't you?"

The face of B. C. D. clouded. "I have."

"Called Glade, Elisabeth Glade?"

The famous novelist shook his famous head. "I wish she were. Note that I say 'were', Sim, not 'was.' What I call the Bodyguard declare that I can't write grammar so I have bought an English Grammar and really am doing rather well. But my secretary — no, not Glade; my secretary is called Artifex,— she treats me as an elderly aunt treats a small nephew and I am frightened of her and I hate her. But I know a Miss Glade, an Elisabeth Glade."

Sim exclaimed, "You do! Tell me about her."

B. C. D. told. Pretty, dark, pale, worked too hard, he

thought —" What Miss Marr said," interjected Sim, troubled — an orphan, he had a kind of idea. " Yes, yes, she would be," from Sim — did secretarial work for him when he wanted her; had now for some time been coming to him every afternoon.

" She comes to me to-morrow, at three," B. C. D. concluded, " if you want to meet her ——"

" I very much do. B. C. D.,— funny how natural it comes to call you B. C. D.; but I have heard it everywhere ——"

The famous novelist sighed. " I know. Yes? "

" Why, I very much do want to see this Elisabeth Glade. B. C. D., do you remember in our talks out there talking about things a girl used to write me in letters; rather, rather deepish things."

" Perfectly well. You read me some."

" Well, this was the girl."

B. C. D. was immensely interested. " It is extraordinary. You are sure it is the same."

" Positive. It must be her."

" ' She ',' corrected B. C. D.; " must be she, not her; I am a tiger for faulty grammar these days; I will lend you my Bodyguard book. But seriously, Sim, this is fine." He had been watching Sim's face through all this and, lamentable though were his excursions in literature, he was not without sympathetic insight. " I tell you what we will do, old man. You come to my place tomorrow afternoon and meet the girl. I will clear out and leave you to tea together."

" You're a brick, B. C. D."

" My dear chap, I am an outrage; you ask the Bodyguard. But not a bit; you will have a heap to talk about and I will clear out and leave you to it. Twenty-four Hunter Street, Bloomsbury, is my address; just off Bloomsbury Square."

Sim made a note. "Not that it is necessary," he smiled, "I am not likely to forget it. I lost sight of her. I have been wanting to find her again, badly, oh, for a long time."

B. C. D. said gravely, "Remembering those letters, and by what I have seen of her, and now you tell me it was she who wrote you the letters, I can imagine it, Sim."

Sim touched his hand. "I like you, B. C. D."

"I like you, Sim."

The illustrious novelist then looked around. "I tell you what you can do for me now, Sim. Convoy me out of this dreadful place, will you, like a good chap? If you and I can be talking earnestly until we get to the door I can slip past the people who dragged me here and escape other people as well."

Sim laughed. "Right; and I'll tell you one thing to talk about as we run the gauntlet — Miss Glade *and* this Miss Artifex? do you want two secretaries, then?"

"I don't *want* a secretary at all," the super-famous novelist told him. "What happens to me is — my life is awful, you know — that I am supposed to be worth a thousand a fortnight and I get rushed into all kinds of things that I simply loathe and have no earthly use for simply because people are for ever saying to me, 'Oh, haven't you got this? and haven't you got that?'; cars, cottages, castles, yachts, heaven knows what; and the kind of chap I am I simply can't keep on saying No, so I go and get the dashed things and hate them like poison and never go near them, and a resident secretary, this Artifex dragon, is one of them. You know, I lie awake at night thinking out things for her to do."

Sim was laughing.

"It's the plain truth, Sim. Just at present I have got her working at the British Museum hunting up Assyrian slabs or some dashed thing for a novel I have told her I am going to write on Babylon or some dashed place. And

the dickens even of that is that I have to sweat up the subject myself; I was at the London library two hours today, in order to keep my end up with her. My life is awful, you know. But when I want any real secretarial work done I get this Glade girl and do it quite pleasantly just as I used to before all this infernal fuss broke loose on me."

Sim was about to speak; but they were at the doors and the world-famous novelist, looking all about him like a hunted stag, grabbed at his hand in farewell and stayed him, "I'm going like a greased flash, Sim. I have a chance now and if I don't take it I am done."

He fled five quick paces to one exit; stopped violently; abruptly turned, and with paces quicker yet fled through another.

Sim, had he been able to follow him and to have known his thoughts, would have seen him plunge for one of the four great lifts; swerve from its occupants like a shying horse; stampede into another; crimson painfully at a whisper among its crowded occupants of "That's the author of 'The Road Home'"; nervously take his hat and coat from a superb buff plush carpet attendant; drop his hat; bend to recover it; collide his head with stunning force against the head of the buff plush carpet who also had bent; fumble for a sixpence; realise that he was supposed to be worth a thousand a fortnight and that everyone knew it and fumble for instead, and give, a half-crown; realise that the buff plush carpet was offering back to him the penny which in his confusion he had mistakenly fumbled out; accept the penny, not knowing on earth what else to do; and, newly crimson, and newly hating the life he led and all who peopled it, make a false shot for the exit revolving doors, find himself wedged in a compartment of it on the heels of a stout and commanding lady who cried "Oh, oh, oh!"; as he staggered

through it upon her heels and then rush miserably away into the open.

"Goodnight, Mr. Ash," said a commissionaire whom the famous but unhappy man never in his life had seen before.

"This is awful," muttered the famous but unhappy man. He had a car but never used it; taxi-cabs awaited him in long lines but he never rode in taxi-cabs. A bus took him to Bloomsbury Square. Beneath a lamp-post, as he hurried along the pavement, stood two young women; they stared at him; he avoided their stare. He heard them speak; he then heard, called after him, "The Road Home!"

"This is frightful," muttered the world-famous author, hurrying.

At the corner was a policeman who looked at him steadily.

"Goodnight," said the famous novelist, hurrying.

"Goodnight to you, Mr. Ash," said the policeman.

"This simply is unbearable," said the famous novelist and wanly let himself into No. 24.

CHAPTER XXI

B. C. D. (II)

Sim was early at the house of the famous novelist on the afternoon of the morrow. No. 24 Hunter Street presented itself to him as a typical Bloomsbury house in a typical Bloomsbury thoroughfare; and there was further presented to him when he knocked the sound of an upper window being very cautiously raised and the sight of the world-known head of the world-known novelist very cautiously projecting itself therefrom.

At sight of Sim looking up from below, the world-known head thrust itself boldly into full view. "Hullo, Sim! My landlady's out; I'll chuck down the latchkey; catch; caught, sir! Let yourself in, Sim, and come straight up, first floor."

Sim, proceeding as directed, wondering a little at the description "landlady" as applied to a member of the domestic staff of a world-famous novelist, and a little more at the typical Bloomsbury hall and stairway up which he advanced, found the great author himself at the head of the flight, was warmly greeted and conducted into a large front room. He looked curiously about him. Comfortably but very plainly furnished; decorated with a few admirable dry-points and with a few books, none of which appeared to be light reading and all to be cheap reprints; markedly tidy; its principal content an immense table obviously used as a writing table on the surface of which were aligned with exquisite precision writing sundries and tobacco-smoking sundries; revealing through partially opened folding doors a bedroom leading out of it; the

room was obviously a workroom and the workroom of an incredibly orderly-minded man, but it was not (to Sim) as obviously the room of a man credited with earning more royalties in a month than a streetful of novelists in a lifetime.

But he said politely, " This is a nice room, B. C. D."

" It is good," agreed the world-famous author proudly. " This is my bedroom." He pushed open the folding-doors and Sim was shown a bedroom, overlooking a mews, as exquisitely neat as was the other apartment, shoes in trees perfectly aligned, trousers in press, a green canvas bath in one corner, a spirit stove, shining like new silver, and tea-making materials neatly arranged on a low table, in another.

" Convenient, opening into one another like that," said the famous novelist proudly, returning with Sim into the front apartment.

" Very," said Sim and then voiced the bepuzzlement that had him. " Do you live here, B. C. D.? "

The author of " The Road Home " regarded him with a curious look. " I *inhabit* here," he said.

" That evidently has some special meaning. What is rather puzzling me, B. C. D., is that this morning at the club I saw a whole page in an illustrated weekly giving photographs of the interiors of your London Residence, as the paper called it. The rooms were what I call devilish swagger, Adams fireplaces, antique furniture, stunning library, heaven knows what; but I didn't see this room, B. C. D., or that, or anything like them, or that camp bath, there was a mighty fine fitted bathroom though, and a ——"

" What you saw," said the great novelist gravely, " is, as the paper no doubt said, where I *live*. This place wasn't in the pictures because this is where I *inhabit*. Of course you won't give me away, Sim, so I will let you into a

secret. That infernal house you saw pictured is one of the things I got rushed into for peace sake like my secretary and all the rest as I was telling you last night. People said hadn't I got a beautiful house? and that I must have a beautiful house, so at last I had to get a beautiful house, a Bijou Residence of Charm and Character as the house agent's list described it, and I hate it like poison and never go near it except when I must. It is in Green Street, off Park Lane; I thought *that* would satisfy them; and I keep a butler and his wife there and a chauffeur and his wife and one or two other creatures, I believe, all of whom I am frightened of, particularly the butler, and my secretary lives there, the Artifex woman. About two nights a week I creep in there after they have all gone to sleep and either rumple the bed to pretend I have slept in it or, if I feel I must, actually sleep in the hideous thing and then scoot off again immediately after breakfast and come back here where, as I say, I *inhabit* and where I do everything for myself and am entirely happy — or as happy as I can ever expect to be these days. This hardly-ever-in-the-house business, over at my hideous residence, makes the butler and all of them think I live a fast life and they spread the gossip that I do and that is all to the good because with my incredible wealth I am supposed to live a fast life."

"You are a rum chap, B. C. D."

"I am a dashed unfortunate chap. Why *should* I have this kind of thing shoved on me just because people buy my books? I tell you, Sim, the strain of living in that house without living in it and finding things for all those people to do keeps me on the go hours on end."

"I should say it must. What *do* they do?"

"Well, the butler and all that crowd I don't quite know. Of course they have to account to visitors for my absence, and what I do there is to leave all my invitation

cards, and all my letters inviting me to country house visits, prominently kicking about the room called my study. The butler and his gang read them and then they think, and they tell people, that I am where the cards and letters say I am. At this moment I am supposed to be in a place in Northampton for a fortnight. It is ripping getting a clear fortnight off. I wrote that letter to myself and left it under the butler's nose. I pretty often do that when I want time off. Then they have to look after my secretary, the Artifex woman; and then sometimes, when I am rushed into it, I give dinner parties there. I give them but I don't always attend them. Last week I gave one and took the train to Bath and then sent a wire to arrive when they were all assembled saying, 'Car breakdown.' Miss Artifex does hostess when I do that. It is a life, I tell you. The chauffeur is easier to manage. I push *him* off by the day, or daily for a week, to hospitals and places where they are glad of it for the patients. I do all that by telephone from here, not under my own name of course; every single thing I do under my own name, even to having my hair cut, gets into the papers. At the present moment the chauffeur is Mrs. Jabez Thoop's car (rather fun inventing names) lent to a Home for Old Ladies in Streatham Hill for three days. And the secretary, as I have told you, is doing Assyrian research at the Museum. Meanwhile I *inhabit* here just as I used to do before all this fuss; I have no immediate relatives, you know, and I am working, and nice Miss Glade comes to me in the afternoons and ——"

A knocking on the door interrupted him. "There she is, Sim. That is her code knock. Look out, old man, and see if it *is* your Miss Glade."

Sim who, even amidst his amusement at these revelations of the inner life of the famous novelist, with half his attention given to the meeting with Elisabeth had

been but half amused, drew a quick breath and went to the window and looked out.

He drew in. "It is, B. C. D." he said.

B. C. D. saw emotion in his face. He went to his bedroom and brought hat and stick from it. "I will let her in and send her up," he said. "I will stagger off somewhere and you will be alone. I shall not tell her you are here, shall I?"

"No," Sim said.

"Right. She knows where to make the tea and all that. Stay as long as you like. I am going to hare about on Hampstead Heath. Goodbye, old man."

He was gone before Sim could thank him. In a minute were sounds of feet lightly up the stairs; the door then opened.

Sim said, "Elisabeth!"

The slim, pale girl, arrested on the threshold, framed in the doorway, put her hand to her heart, "Oh, Sim!"

CHAPTER XXII

ELISABETH (II)

He had thought and thought—How, when he found her, should he greet her? With some commonplace; with some light word? With some accustomed opening; with some gay banter? He had thought and thought — What, when she first saw him, would she say? That this was strange; that this was good? That it was years and years; that it seemed only yesterday?

They met. His sole word was the word, her name, "Elisabeth." His voice, which in his thoughts on this had challenged, given hail, expressed relief, delight, contained no challenge, had no ring. Her name went from him still-ly, on a strange note, almost hushed; passed from his lips as might a figure in a tableau arise and steal away; was breathed as in a trance might be addressed some vision that a sound might cause to fade — "El-isa-beth!"

And she, "Oh, Sim!"; not greeting, not amaze, not joy; rather a stifling as it were of pain, a whispered cry. "Oh, Sim!", a piteous expostulation.

He had thought and thought — How, after greeting, would he go on? Moved, as he was not prepared to be moved, by sight of her; compassioned, and not prepared to be compassioned, by her note of lamentable expostulation; profoundly stirred, conscious now of emotions he unconsciously had nursed, he was held mute, he could not go on . . .

He said at last, "After so long."

She said, "So very long, Sim," and touched the hand that he extended.

She closed the door and came past him into the room.

He just stood there, silent.

She began to take off the wrap she wore. "How are you here?" she asked.

He used only five words, and those scarcely could effect, to tell her. "I knew Ash in France."

A very great and, as it affected them, a very terrible restraint was on them. Her wrap removed, she began at her hat. "I am here to work, you know," she said.

He told her, "I know that."

She put off her hat and at a loss then for what else immediately to do she faced him. "Well, well," she said. It was a kind of dismissal; a kind of "Well, we have met again; that is all over; now I must get on with things."

There was a deep couch, done in leather, against one window. He went to it and sat down. "Come and sit here, Elisabeth. We have to talk."

She came.

She was dressed very simply in black, white at her wrists, white at her throat where a broad silk collar fell. He saw in her the girl he had been wont to see; saw the soft olive of her hue, warmed on her cheeks as faintly reddens in the sun a ripened peach; saw how her hair's soft brown caressed her brow; and how her eyes, home of a spirit, kind, maternal, were fringed with lashes that a breath, they were so long and dense and soft, would stir; and how the broad mouth, denying her face a classic beauty, spoke in its width (it is the sign) her intellectuality. These he had seen of old in careless days; now saw he also, graven in those eyes and on that mouth, the image of the inner self she had revealed him in those revealing letters she had sent him in the war; now saw he, chased

over all, the chasings that the new and hidden years had chiselled on the old; the bloom paled over, the soft curves sharpened down ("working too hard" had not they said?), tenuity of outline, as of resources deeply drawn upon, a droop of lids, of lips, as of resistance ("Oh, Sim!" had she not expostulated?) almost out.

He said, "I have wanted you, Elisabeth."

He had thought and thought — How, when, finding her, he should tell her how he had wanted her, should he begin to tell her why? How tell the vague perplexity, the impulse without direction, the call without place of call, that in cold words must sound so vain, so futile, so self-esteemed? Now, after a space, she asked him why he had wanted her; and not the thoughts he had rehearsed but revelation come to him by this contact with her, resurgence of the causes that had caused his voice only to breathe "Elisabeth" on seeing her, gave him his answer.

"Why have you wanted me, Sim?"

He said, "Because I love you, Elisabeth."

She began to cry.

He had put one arm about her; her hands which with his other hand he had sought to take she had slipped from him and put against her face; he used that hand to hold her to him, her face against his shoulder.

When she was something stilled, not questioning yet her grief, "I love you Elisabeth," he said again.

She said, her voice catching, "Sim, there never has been a word of love between us."

"But I love you, Elisabeth."

She essayed to put herself upright and from him. "Sim, I am not to be loved."

He restrained her. "Turn your face to me, Elisabeth."

"Sim, I am not to be loved."

"Turn your face to me, Elisabeth."

She turned her face to his. He kissed her. She sighed profoundly and lay within his arms . . .

That profound sigh she gave, a deep and single pulse of all her forces, vital and spiritual; and that relax into his arms, a subjection to him, profound and unreserved, of all her being, mental and physical; had for their sound and symbol, "Oh, let me sleep"; and a long time, as if she slept, he held her.

She had said "Not to be loved"; but here in that sleep within his arms was her abandonment to love, and his; and of the state of love — not of the processes of love, nor of love's deeds, nor even of the thoughts of love — but of the sheer state of loving, how writes the pen? For if to render life is the office of art, then art, of loving, is mute; for love is mute. It is not by their words that lovers love; language with all its words has given only three to lovers; jealous of even three it gives to the single lover, seeking to express to himself his state, but two alone —"I love."

Mutely — his spirit joined with hers in passage to those transcendental planes, their virtues, visions, understandings, awes, to which the soul, by love bewinged to rise and glimpse, by death drawn in to have and know, alone hath passage — mutely in that communion those words were told by them; in a while, the flight dissolved, its spell, like afterglow, upon them, words came and these he floated to her in that sleep of hers, lamps floated in the darkness down a gentle stream; and had her murmured answers back, airs murmured through a grove at dawn — that it was wonderful this mutual love, at re-encounter, with no word gone before; that he had loved her since her letters and not till she came in —"dear face I saw, pale hands I touch"— had known it love; that she — "Oh, Sim, if you had had the letters only my heart could

write "—had always loved him; murmurs, tones scarcely heard, hushed litanies . . .

She sighed, at last, again and stirred; one who returned now from dream to life, from sleep to load, and she began to move herself from where, abandoned to a dream, she had reposed. The dream abandoning, "But, Sim, not to be loved," she said.

He let her from his arms. "Elisabeth, why do you say you are not to be loved?"

As though the words, her words by him repeated, returned to her a vow momentarily set down, remorsefully reassumed, with suddenness she completed her motion from him and set herself upright.

"Sim, it is so; not to be loved. Things have happened to me, Sim. My father ——"

He sought to fill for her that most unhappy breach. "I knew there had been some trouble."

"How much did you know, Sim?"

He put a hand on her hands. "Elisabeth, I never heard all the story; I only heard the fact — that your father had been charged with something ——"

She said, "Misappropriation of some money."

"Something; I do not know; I do not mind. All that I mind is that you look ill, overwrought, unhappy. All that I know is that I have found you. All that I care is that you say you are not to be loved. Elisabeth, you are not telling me that you are doing the silly stuff they only do in books — telling me you are not to be loved because your father was accused ——"

"Sim, he was convicted; they made him a convict."

He pressed her hands —"Not to be loved because your father was a —" he burked the evil word —"went to prison? You could not tell me that, Elisabeth; that is only done in books; that is not possible from you to me."

She shook her head. "It is not that, Sim. When this happened, this dreadful thing; oh, Sim, to my poor father, you knew him, Sim; when it happened I thought of you and I knew, knew that when you knew it never would make any difference to you. But, Sim, it has made, it made at once, a difference to me; it made me not to be loved; not because my poor father had sinned; but for a reason binding, sacred, Sim."

"Tell me," he said.

She said, "I will tell you it all, Sim; all that happened; all of the why I am not to be loved, Sim."

She told him.

Her father, a solicitor, had been sole trustee of a sum of money, £5,000, held for two sisters, elderly maiden ladies by name Andiron ("pronounced," she gave the faintest smile, "to rhyme with bandyron, they were so particular about that.") Gertrude and Anne. When one should die the capital was to be handed over to the survivor.

"Sim," she said, and he could feel her hands in her intensity squeeze his own. "Sim, there was not a prospect — when it all happened and my poor father, all broken up, told me everything, he said to me, and I who frequently saw them knew it for myself — that there was not a prospect that either of them would die for many, many years. They were both very strong, both of the kind who 'never have had a day's illness' and who boast of it. My poor father counted on that, Sim. He was not exactly in trouble, but he wanted some money temporarily, urgently, and he — it was deeply wrong — but my poor father, Sim — he borrowed this capital; he realised the investments; he paid the sisters their dividends himself for two quarters and by the third quarter would have recovered and reinvested the money. Sim, the younger one, Anne, slipped on her own staircase and

broke her thigh and some mysterious trouble developed and she died. Sim, it all happened in no time. My poor father heard that she was dead, and buried, Sim, before he ever knew she had been ill. Then the other sister, Gertrude, came to the office, to my poor father, for her £5,000."

Elisabeth stopped; her face told why. Sim patted her hand, "Why tell me, dear?"

"You must know, Sim." She swallowed and went on. "She always had been very fussy and poking, Gertrude. She came every quarter-day for her allowance, would have it given into her own hand and always knew, and generally argued, to a farthing any fluctuations in the dividends." Elisabeth gave a pained half-laugh. "God knows, poor thing, she had need to be inquiring.

"Sim, I never as long as I live shall forget that day, that morning, that moment when she came. I worked with my father in his office, you remember. I was his secretary. He was dictating a letter to me when she was announced; and I got up to go but he stopped me; he said, 'Stay here, Beth; there is something for you to hear.' Sim, that was extraordinary, wasn't it, keeping me to hear it like that? Sim, it all was extraordinary. My father could have delayed, gained time; he could have explained, shown that he would keep up the interest until he could pay the capital. Sim, my poor father was not a criminal. He told me that he felt that sudden death of the other sister to be the hand of God on him and that he accepted the hand of God."

It was piteous to Sim, this lamentable recital. He said, "Dear, why need I know?"

She touched her eyes with her handkerchief. "You must know, Sim. Sim, she came in; dressed in grey, looking about her, short, thin, determined; the kind of woman you see, and avoid, at a bargain sale; and she

said at once, 'I have come for my money'; and my poor father, making one feeble attempt, said, 'For your money? You will not leave the investments as they are?' and she said, 'I shall think about that; but not with you, Mr. Glade. I am quite well able to manage my own affairs now that they are my own. So I have come for my money, for the *scrip*.' Sim, she said *scrip* with a kind of *r-r-rip* sound as if she were snapping her lips on something suddenly blown into her mouth — *scr-r-ip,* like that. Sim, my poor father just said, 'Miss Andiron, I have not got your money for you.' She cried, 'Not got my money?' her voice right up. My poor father said, 'I have used your money!' Sim, her head seemed to me to be stretched right, right up, and her voice came ever so high out of it 'Used my money!' Sim, my poor father said, 'I have used your money; but, Miss Andiron, I am afraid there is another term for what I have done, I have misappropriated your money.'"

Sim got up and went across the room and then came back to her; "Elisabeth!"; and sat and held her hands again.

"Sim, they tried him. I was to have had a seat at the barristers' table but I could not bear somehow to be there. I sat in the gallery just above him, sideways to the dock, my poor father in the dock, his dear head, his dear face. . . . Sim, three years . . . penal servitude. . . . Sim, they let me go down to him, to see him before he was taken away. There was a long row of little cells and he was at the end, a man told me. So I went along, fumbling the wall, Sim. A man came out as I got near the end. He was the detective who had had charge of the case and he had been kind all through. He stopped me and he said, 'Miss, there is trouble here!' So I said, 'What trouble?' So he told me and took me into the cell."

She paused a long time. She made some efforts to take up her story and they failed her. Presently she held an effort.

"Sim, what seemed to me years afterwards I went out of the Old Bailey, the detective holding my arm. He was very kind. He said he would get me a cab. When we came into the street Miss Andiron was waiting for me; she had waited all that time. So she said to me, 'Well, now.' So I said to her, 'Please, my poor father is dead.'"

Sim caught his breath and turned away; then turned to her and made to take her in his arms; but she prevented him. "Sim, this is only leading up to what I have to say."

She told him how her father had collapsed and died — "My poor father, Sim —" immediately they brought him into the cell beneath the dock, a blood clot that had ceased the action of the heart, and how he was dead when she went in to him. She told him how, when all her father's affairs were settled, when she had sold her home, all the furniture —"Sim, all my private things, every last stitch of my clothes that I didn't actually want, all my bits of jewellery, every smallest thing that I could turn to money"— she had been able to hand Miss Andiron just under a thousand pounds. She said then, "And so, Sim, what I said just now, what I began by saying — I am not to be loved. Sim, I have a duty, a bond, a trust, a sacred vow to my poor father to pay Miss Andiron back the money that he — Sim — robbed her of. There is £4,000 that I have set myself to pay; then I will feel him clear, happy, absolved, my poor father. So I am working, Sim, hard, hard; thinking of nothing else; doing nothing else; until it is paid. To love, Sim, to marry, means my duty lost, my trust abandoned, my vow not kept.

I must pay and to pay I must work, always, until it is paid. So, Sim — not to be loved, dear."

He did not realise at that first telling the strength nor the depth of her determination. "Elisabeth, this does not stand between us," he said. "There are ways out of this."

"Sim, there are no ways out."

"I could borrow you the money; £4,000 — Andrew would find it for me, Elisabeth."

"Sim, the money must be mine, made by me."

He said, "You are earning it"— he indicated with a gesture of his hand the writing-table with its papers — "like this, secretarial work?"

She nodded. She had a very good private connection, she told him; doctors, authors, two members of Parliament, men who wanted secretarial assistance only for few hours at a time. By fitting in one with another, and by letting no hour go unoccupied, she could earn in this way much more than in a permanent post. She told him that she was giving Miss Andiron £50 a quarter, £200 a year, setting by at least four pounds a week for the purpose, living on thirty shillings.

"Elisabeth!" he reproached her. "Living on thirty shillings!"

"I can do it," she said.

"Married, you still can earn."

"Not in the same degree, Sim. It takes all my time, this. Seven days a week, all hours a day."

He made a calculation, "£200 a year, a thousand in five years, four thousand twenty years. Elisabeth, twenty years!"

"Sim, therefore not to be loved," she said.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PURPOSE

He was telling her presently the thing to tell her which had been, before he found her, the only reason that he wished to find her. He told her; but the words with which at the end she received it were delivered not in the room where they sat but in the street where, much later, they took leave. She was engaged to be at B. C. D.'s service that afternoon (and every afternoon at this period) from three to five; and the world-famous author of "The Road Home" making no reappearance ("Bless him," said Sim), and Sim walking with her to her next place of appointment, a doctor in Harley Street, it was there that they parted and there that her words, astonishingly come to her, were said.

As they walked, leaving the subject of which he had been telling her, it was of their meeting and of all their meeting meant that they spoke; and when outside the door decorated with many professional plates he had to leave her, "Oh, I turn to my life again with a new, wonderful strength, Sim," she said.

He held both her hands. "And I?" he questioned. "Elisabeth, do I turn with a new purpose to mine?"

Appeal was in his voice; appeal against her vow. He meant, she knew, the purpose now of finding employment wherewith would be enough for them to marry.

She shook her head. "Dear Sim, for you it is to find your real purpose, the purpose for which you were spared, Sim."

He dropped her hands and turned disconsolately away.

It was then that her words came to her.

His head as he turned away was drooped, his arm the nearer to her hung with a certain dejection by his side. The outline he presented stood shadowed, sombre, on the gathering dusk; and violently with that disturbance with which strikes into the tenantry of the mind a visitor come unbidden she had the thought — Where had she seen that pose before? that shoulder turned away, that drooped head, that pendant, melancholy hand, all that dejected mien done in those same sombre hues? Where seen it? What suggestion from it was struggling now for birth within her mind?

He had told her while they sat together the whole of the strange thing that had happened to him in the war and the strange influences that it had brought upon him. He always had known it would be hard to tell; he had found it at first harder even than he had imagined. Achingly he had desired to tell someone these strange influences that had come over him, disturbing his mode of life, sundering him from his settled career, altering his habit of thought, calling him from what he had been to something that he felt, but was not shown, he should be; and longingly, when with certainty he came to feel that of all the world that someone only could be she, he had wished to find and tell her.

He had found her and the immediate thing told was not that which beset his mind but that which, unconsciously, had possessed his heart, that he loved her; and he had heard then, for disquietude newer yet upon his disquietude, the vow, denying herself to love, that she had pledged, the veil, immuring herself in cloisters where love must not be, that she had taken. It had been difficult, thus new perplexed, to open out those secret things of his when with " Sim, tell me of yourself now " the moment he had longed for was presented to him. It had been

difficult to approach "What is it, Elisabeth? What is it that has happened to me and that I am to do?" when now the story leading up to it was overlaid by these new elements — his love for her, the obstacle she had placed between their love — which now had come into his life.

But these were difficulties which, when he began to tell her, the strong tide of that which he had to tell caused him to throw aside. The thing that had happened to him, the change that it had caused in him, this was a sea whose mysterious currents, whose waves of doubt, whose purposeless but strongly pressing tides, many months he had battled with; and now again advancing into it to breast it he cast away other disturbances as one shipwrecked and about to try for land by swimming casts away clothes.

He told her all, from the beginning. "Why am I spared?" First the hysteria, half laughing half crying, with which he had said it; then the resentment, "Why *should* I be spared?" with which he had hoped his fate would be joined to the fate of all those others to whom fate came; then the apprehension, "Will it come to me now, or now, or now?"; then the longing that it would come — now, now, now — and he have done with it; then, torn and exhausted by these, the cry in that damp and airless dug-out to his mother: "Mother, *why* am I spared?" Then the answer. "Elisabeth, as clearly as I hear my own voice, and yet with no voice speaking, the *knowledge* 'You are spared because you are reserved for a special purpose.'"

He told her, from that knowledge. First the exquisite comfort of the knowledge itself, the exquisite comfort just of the knowledge that there *was* a reason for his sparing; then the working within him of the thought that it was for a purpose that this sparing was his; then the feeling that not in pursuit of his accustomed ways was this purpose to be found; then the abandonment at these

benests of his army career; now, in these weeks, daily, ceaselessly, the formless, purposeless, all negative, never positive, drifting in quest of what that purpose was, where its direction, how it should be found.

He told her it all, from first to last; and, a thousand times though he had told it to himself, he told it now more clearly, more urgently than ever himself had heard it because now — now at last — was outlet, now at last discharge of that which burning like a wound within him till now had had no vent. He told it, too, as even when longing to tell her he had not known he could tell it, because now was love to ease it out, love to receive it.

When he had finished he smiled and held her hands. "There! That is all I want of you," he said; "just to hear me tell it; nothing more. There is nothing you need say, nothing you need try to advise. How could you? How could anyone? Haven't I shown myself, Elisabeth, just a dreamer of dreams; and who today can be a soothsayer, an interpreter of visions, an expounder of portents? It is not a Daniel I have been looking for; I cannot expect a Daniel. I just wanted to tell someone and I knew it was only you that I could tell."

Her words (then) were: "Oh, this is very extraordinary, Sim."

He took her hands: "That is all I wanted, just as you have said it. You understand; I knew you would. That is all I wanted."

But now as dejected he turned from her at the house of the door in Harley Street she had suddenly, out of some suggestion given to her by the forlorn pose of his body, a very strange sense of being upon the threshold of a deeper understanding of what he had told her, of feeling within her a sense similar to that sense with which sometimes we feel we have seen or done before a thing that consciously we have never seen or done. The

suggestion of his pose? but what was the suggestion? His outline shadowed, sombre, merged in the dusk; his head, as he turned, drooped; his arm, as he turned, dejectedly pendant . . . As he turned? Turned? Where had she seen it? What further prompting seemed in that word "turned"?

It came to her. It was the painting by Watts of the man who from the bidding to the service of Christ turned away "for he had great possessions."

She caught her breath.

"Sim!"

He looked back.

"Sim, there *is* a purpose for you. I know it. I am convinced of it."

His smile, questioning her, was pale, wan, scarcely a smile.

"Sim, I believe that it is of God."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PLAN

"I OFTEN think," Sim was writing to her, "I think every day, and always at night, of that astonishing thing you said to me, that my purpose was 'of God.' Did I tell you, when afterwards in those few good days before I left London to come on this trip we discussed it, did I tell you that my mother's favourite hymn was,

> God moves in a mysterious way,
> His wonders to perform.

Did I tell you that or has its connection with what you said only linked up in me since we parted? I try to recall, but honestly cannot; odd things like that keep coming to me and I somehow never can fix the actual moment of their coming; which in itself is odd, puzzling. But what I would say, dear, is that, if you are right and this strange purpose for which (as I *know*) I was kept is 'of God'; 'for God,' as you afterwards said you must have meant; then He moves in a mysterious way indeed, too mysterious (I say it very far from flippantly, though it has a flippant sound) too mysteriously for me — much.

"I just cannot conceive any connection between God and me (these things sound flippant, no, impious, almost blasphemous, to write; but I can write only plain vulgar words, the words I talk and think) I just cannot conceive any connection between God and me, and, Elisabeth, I don't know that I want to. Dear, you know the kind of life I have led, just an absolutely *ordinary* life; straight

enough and all that — what is that *but* ordinary? — but absolutely careless and irresponsible and certainly with nothing whatever in it between me and God."

The appearance of the letter, as Elisabeth read it, here changed; and the tone seemed to change. That which she had thus far read stood black upon the paper as though it had been left, while the writer thought, to dry; a fine nib had written it and carefully had formed the letters, as though the writer wrote slowly, with circumspection. That which followed was blue as though quickly written and quickly blotted; done with a flowing pen as though the writer wrote in heat, vexed; done in characters boldly formed and frequently underscored as though the writer, reading over what he had written, had read a challenge and with passion levelled his reply.

"I do not know, I see I have said, that I want there to be anything in my life between me and God. I *do* know; I *don't*. It is not that I have any particular vices that I feel I should have to give up. I don't know that I have any real vices. But I don't want to be *messed up* with religion; I don't *want* that kind of thing; I don't understand it and I resent it. I want to live my own way and I don't want to be *interfered* with. I feel it would interfere with me, that kind of thing, and I don't want to be interfered with. No, I say it flatly, Elisabeth, there is no connection that I can conceive between me and God — none."

He had written and erased words which seemed to be false starts at a new sentence. There came then:

"The only possible connection between me and God is my mother, and ——"

The "and" was erased. With strange abruptness the letter ended there.

* * * * *

Another letter, dated a little later, had this reference to the same matter. It was added beneath the signature as a postscript, and the body of the letter was of no relation to it.

"Elisabeth, I wish you had not put that 'of God' idea into my head. It worries me."

* * * * *

Another letter again, also had a postscript.

"Elisabeth, I sometimes have an uncanny, frightened feeling that God is *after* me."

* * * * *

Sim wrote these letters, as the first suggests, while on a trip out of London. It was arranged for him by Andrew; its itinerary was among the locations of great and small industrial concerns, in the Midlands, in Lancashire, on the Clyde, in which Lord Staverton had controlling or sympathetic interest; and its object was to find for Sim some civil employment in which he could engage.

"Niggs, old man," he had said to Andrew on the morning after his meeting with Elisabeth, "Niggs, old man, I want a job now; I want to get to work."

Andrew gave his nearest approach to a smile. "That is supposed to have been the idea all along, isn't it?"

"Yes, but now I am out for it, Niggs; and I want it in London."

"In London? It won't be easy. About half a million of you ex-army men are hunting jobs in London, heaps of them doing it on their uppers."

"It must be in London, Niggs."

"I doubt it will be, Sim."

Sim took this with a troubled brow. He wanted employment now, and he felt, in this first urgent desire of it, that he did not mind what kind of employment; if it did

not seem to suit his "purpose" what matter — now? He had a new purpose. Money must be earned that he might marry Elisabeth; if he could earn it, earn, as the saying was, "good" money, her scruples, he believed, could be, if not overcome, at least accommodated. She had declared herself "not to be loved" until her vow was done (twenty years!); but she might, he felt, be won from it if it could be got round by paying off Miss Andiron from their married income. Along the same reasoning the employment must be in London. Elisabeth certainly would insist on earning some of her debt herself and her connection was in London.

Andrew said: "As to London, why not Charles's offer?"

"Niggs, because I want better pay than that."

"What did he offer you?"

"Two fifty a year. I want twice that, Niggs."

"You will not get it—in London."

Sim frowned again. "I thought pay ran higher here than in the provinces?"

"It does." Duke Paris stood before the fireplace and looked at his brother asking him for work precisely as he would have looked at any stranger similarly applying. "Point is, Sim, that in London competition is greater and opportunities — in your line — fewer."

Linda came in.

"Run away, Linda," Sim said. "Run away and powder your nose. This is man's talk." He turned to Andrew and laughed a little ruefully. "My line? I am dashed if I know, Niggs, what my line is — quite."

Linda sat herself on the arm of his chair. "Your line is to look pretty in a nice red coat, and you were a silly little boy to leave the army."

"They don't wear red coats now, ugly."

Andrew during these exchanges remained stern, reserved, dealing with a business suitor, upright against the mantelpiece. When the two had finished: "That is precisely the trouble," he said. "What *can* you do, Sim?"

Sim's mouth twitched. He looked troubled. This was serious to him. "You are asking," he said.

Andrew saw the twitch, saw the trouble. They were signs he saw daily on the faces of the ex-service men who obtained entry to him; and on those faces they moved him not in the smallest degree; business was business; it was not, and especially the business for which he stood was not, a charitable organisation. But this was Sim! This was the jolly little beggar of the old days who called him Niggs and this was simple, clean young Sim who gave him "Niggs, old man, how goes it?" now. He put away his frigid air. "Old man," he said kindly, "what you can do and do well is handle men. I know jobs, several, where I could put the right man but they are not man-handling jobs and you are not the right man. If I knew ——"

Linda cut in. "Andrew, I've always known you were a monster but I think now you are the limit. It's just this same old fiendishness of yours about not using your position for anything that anyone wants. If ——"

Andrew pronounced gravely, "That is it."

"Well, you ought to be boiled and sent in a handcart to feed the Dogs' Home at Battersea. I'd send you, and mint sauce with you, if dogs like mint sauce, with pleasure. If you know any jobs you ought to put Sim into them, *all* of them. He's your brother, and he's fought for his country, and he's a dear, and I love him. What more you want, God knows."

Sim said, "Andrew is perfectly right, Linda."

"Right! My goodness, I would like to slap your face,

Sim! Siding with him after I ——" She tossed up her hands in mock disgust.

"Well, he is right," Sim declared. "Apart from anything else, what is the good of shoving me into a job I don't know the first thing about?"

"Because you could learn and because he could hold you there while you did learn or keep you there till all's blue if you didn't learn. He can do anything, that man."

"But that is a thing he doesn't do," Andrew said gravely. He touched a bell and a manservant instantly appeared. "My hat and stick. Is the car there?" Sim or no Sim, he was iron and he was inflexible on this point of never in remotest degree using his influence and, delighting to be teased by Linda and to obey her on any other subject, on this he never would bend even to chaff. "You come along with me, Sim," he said. "We will go hard into this. I have an idea."

"Goodbye for ever, Sim," cried Linda. "I know his ideas. He is going to send you where the name of Staverton has never been heard. Tell me what is the postal service to the moon and I will write you all about my divorce."

"What I suggest, old man," said Andrew, escaped into the car from Linda and driving citywards, "is that you shall do a trip around a lot of big industrial shows in the provinces. You can see people and they can see you. You can handle men and there are men there to handle."

Sim said, "I will do that, Niggs. It is good of you, old man. When can you fix me up to start?"

"I will get a secretary to work out a list right away. I will write the introductions by to-night's mail. To-morrow or the day after you can start."

Sim repeated, "I will do that, Niggs."

CHAPTER XXV

REDSKINS AND PALEFACES (1)

Sim was two months on this tour. He stayed everywhere as the guest of a director of the business he was visiting; or, in the great cities, would be staying with one such director and given the freedom of the residences, the clubs, the resorts and the works of many another. "Give the boy the run of the place," Andrew had written to his friends; and Sim, popular as ever in himself, influentially recommended, was given not only the free run of that which he was out to see but the free comradeship of all who administered those places.

He wrote to Elisabeth every day; and he wrote, at the beginning, very lightheartedly. "'Japhet in search of a Father'" his first letter said. "Did you ever read that, Elisabeth? I knew Marryat by heart when I was a boy. Well, I am 'Simon in search of a Job.' It is going to be fun, I can see."

Fun appeared in the early letters. They were headed "Simon in search of a Job" and they were written in a key of fun. It did not last. The heading, after being constant for some while, suddenly was not and there was no reference to its omission; the amusing turn to his experiences fell away and he described them instead, at the outset of the change, baldly; then, at first briefly and spasmodically, as time went on at much length, and always more with thought than with fact.

"I am not liking this very much," he wrote. "I cannot see myself fitting into this sort of life somehow."

That was at the beginning of the change, when the fun

definitely was gone, the thoughtfulness as yet brief only and spasmodic.

* * * * * *

"The trouble with me is that, my time my own all day, and a free pass everywhere; through the offices and through the yards; poking about where the men live and where the unemployed stand in queues; and feeding and frivoling at night and weekends where the masters live and where we scrum at shows; the trouble with me is that I see both sides of the picture. It is a little unsettling seeing both sides, Elisabeth."

That was midway through the tour when thought outmeasured fact, was long and constant.

* * * * * *

"I have made a phrase for myself which I rather like. It is for the division of society into the working classes and the — well, I don't quite know what the others call themselves in this connection and speaking in the lump; professional classes doesn't cover it because they don't all follow professions, and idle classes (much used by the workers) isn't fair because very few people, I should say hardly any, are actively idle (can you be *actively* idle, actively *idle*?) nowadays. Anyway, my phrase which I have invented for myself and rather like; my division of men as in these places I see them; it is this: Working-classes I don't like because we all work — even old B. C. D., whose Bank Pass-book I saw given by some humorist in a symposium on 'If I had to Choose One Book' the other day, even he, as you have told me, *works*. Lately I had been choosing for myself (and I found it annoyed some people) division into the Less Educated and the Better Educated. But that is clumsy for general use. Now I have invented a comprehensive, literal

and exact distinction; and I have got it out of my Fenimore Cooper memories — Redskins and Palefaces. Don't you think that is rather good, Elisabeth? It hurts no feelings, states plain facts and presents true portraits. Redskins, the men with the brown, often grimy faces who swing the hammers and guide the lathes and pull the levers; Palefaces — well, aren't they, by contrast always pale? — the men who sit in the offices. Redskins, the men who use tools and their brawn; Palefaces, the men who use pens and their brains. Redskins (if you like to push the thing) the ones in warpaint, overalls, corduroys, rough clothes and cloth caps; Palefaces, the soberclad and clothesbrushed ones."

* * * * * *

That was when the thought within the letters ran always upon the contrasts that the writer saw. There followed it closely (and in the unfinished sentence a development is to be detected):

"I am glad you approve Redskin and Paleface as a distinction. Of course the pity is that there should be any need for a distinction. We cannot all do the same work, I know. But I and my brothers do not do the same work and still are brothers. I don't see why ——"

* * * * * *

The letter written last before his return again to London said:

"Elisabeth, I have wanted frightfully and I have tried frightfully to get a job. You know why. I am coming back and I haven't — and, Elisabeth, you know why there too. Strongly and more strongly, day by day as I have seen life as it is lived between the Redskins and the Palefaces, I have felt that not in engagement there possibly can lie the purpose which kept me through the war, made

me leave the service, and has had me drifting in search of it ever since. I am as far from it as ever; but negatively I have learnt a lot. I know now at least what I think about life as I see it. I know where I am now. When, after the war, the influences of what had happened to me started troubling me, I found myself thinking about things in a way I never had done before; but the thoughts were all cloudy, fugitive, having no base. Well, now on this trip they have at least settled, crystallised, taken shape. I know where I am now. I know where I am — but I don't know where I am going.

"There have been, as I have told you, jobs offered me. All the urge and instinct of this 'purpose' of mine, dreadfully strong now, troubling me heaps, has been away from accepting them; but I would have fought that down, silenced the 'purpose' somehow, if the jobs had offered me sufficient to enable me to support you, in the provinces, on the only terms on which I think you would marry me (you say you would not on any; but I believe I could persuade you; but let that pass).

"Elisabeth, it does seem to me significant that none of these jobs has offered me sufficient. I have been ready, anxious, to take one if it will give me you; but it does seem to me significant that none will give me you; it does look to me as if something, mysteriously but insuperably, is working to guide me to this purpose, whatsoever it may be, and working to keep me out of any delusions as to what it is until I find it. It *is* significant, isn't it? Look how things have worked out; look how you have been worked into the scheme. Why, all the time, did I want you so badly? To help my puzzlement. I found you and what has been the result? — that because of you a practical reason has kept me out of drifting into offers which, but for you, sooner or later, tired of doing nothing, sick of being worried by a purpose which seemed to have no

purpose, I probably should have drifted into. Perhaps I yet shall. It seems to me I must do something. But just at present I feel an urge to get away quietly by myself somewhere, away from all this rush and noise that I have been living in, and think out those thoughts that I have gathered here — the Redskin and Paleface thoughts; the thoughts that something *is* working to guide me somewhere. I know where I am now; but I don't know where I am going."

It was this letter that had the postscript: "Elisabeth, I sometimes have an uncanny frightened feeling that God is *after* me."

CHAPTER XXVI

REDSKINS AND PALEFACES (II)

THREE days after Sim's return to London he again was in the train, impelled this time by that "urge to get away quietly by myself somewhere" of which he had written to Elisabeth. "To think out those thoughts that I have gathered here" he had told her; and returning to Mayfair Street with those thoughts instead of with the employment he had set out to find, it was in explanation of that failure that he offered them to Andrew.

"Fruitless, eh, Sim?" Andrew had said.

Linda was out to a dinner-dance ("Feed, flit and flirt," as she expressed it). The brothers had dined alone. Now, in two deep arm-chairs before the fire, Andrew re-opened, by terse summary of the outline given him, the thing they had begun to debate.

"Fruitless, eh?"

Sim gazed into the fire. He said slowly, "Well, I shouldn't call it fruitless, Niggs. It has told me a lot. I know where I am now."

Andrew exhaled a long breath of tobacco-smoke and idly watched it drift about his cigar. He was but very mildly interested. "Yes, that is useful," he said lazily. He had made rings with the last of his exhalations, and, elbow on the arm of his chair, drew his cigar through them. "Precisely where are you, Sim?"

Sim said, "Niggs, I should say that I am at a point where it seems to me that there is something a bit wrong with everything."

Andrew made the sound of a little puff down his nose. "That is comprehensive, anyway."

"Yes, it is comprehensive, Niggs," Sim agreed.

The minute hand of the clock upon the mantelshelf before them moved full five of its divisions, its ticking and a gentle flutter of the flames the only sound within the room.

Sim sat up. "I will tell you a thing, Niggs. Comprehensive, you said; well, I will tell you a thing I ran across that is comprehensive, too, and illuminative of what I mean. This happened at Ginnel, Read's, the big ——"

Andrew's murmur: "I know them well."

"Good. Well, they employ hundreds of hands; I suppose they must have nearly two thousand on their work-roll, men and girls. Well, I should say that of all the shows I saw Ginnel, Read's was about the best; the most modern, the most up-to-date, I mean. I never anywhere saw people working under better conditions; all the work-rooms, all the provisions for the employes were the last word — last word in hygiene, in ventilation, in comfort, in arrangements for rest-rooms, recreation rooms, washing rooms; oh, everything; the last word and always on the lookout — old Ginnel and his managers — to find a later."

"There you are!" said Andrew. His tone was considerably more alert; and without advancing in interest so far as to sit up he straightened his position to a degree and twisted to align his eyes with his brother's. "There you are! When at dinner just now you were talking 'different conditions' between workers and owners stuff, your Redskin and Paleface stuff, Sim, I didn't butt in to argue. But I could have named Ginnel, Read; I am glad you have for me."

"Yes, but wait, Niggs. That is the picture; there is a story. The picture is these model, more than model, work-

shops; a model employer, Ginnel, Read, if ever there was one, you would say. The story is that in a pub near by — I told you how I poked about everywhere — in a pub near by, I got talking to one of the employes, a middle-aged chap, and a sulky, taciturn sort of devil. However, we got putting it across and he opened up. I had started on racing. He hopped straight out of that on to politics, socialism, capitalism, class war and all that; and he put up a lot of bitter stuff — though true, much of it, I had seen it, Niggs — about the miserable conditions of the Workers as opposed to the luxurious lives of the Spenders; that was *his* division of society, Workers and Spenders. I said to him, 'Well, anyway, you Ginnel, Read people haven't got much to complain about. You are done under model conditions that twenty years ago would have been thought heaven, and that crowds of other workers would think heaven to-day. Conditions,' I said, 'a dashed sight better than ever there were at my public school.' Niggs, he spat on the ground. I don't think he did it entirely for contempt because I had been in terror for my boots all the time we were talking, but it well might have been. He spat. 'Model conditions,' he said, 'perfect ventilation, warmth, light, wash-houses with running hot water, canteen, first-aid departments, recreation rooms, all the rest of it. What in hell do you think they give us model conditions like that for?' 'Why to do their duty by you,' I said. He spat again. 'Duty — hell!' he said; 'all that stuff, all those model conditions, is just to get more out of us.'"

Andrew ticked the ash of his cigar into a tray beside him. "A criminal lunatic," he said dispassionately.

"Niggs," Sim said, "there is a lot of truth in it!"

Andrew gave him sudden and bolt-upright attention. "Truth! Why good God alive, Sim ——"

Sim said, "Niggs, old man, there is."

At his brother's violent surprise, and at his outrage of Andrew's principles which had caused it, and at their further outrage which he had in mind, he might have been expected to flush deeply. But he did not flush. His face remained steady and though he fumbled his words, expressing himself ill, his voice was steady. "There is, Niggs. It is not *all* for his people Ginnel fits them up like that. It is partly, I will go further, Niggs, and say it is mostly, with him and with every employer like him, because he knows that with the best conditions you can get the best work."

Andrew, containing himself, said, "Well?"

"They don't put a thousand, or ten thousand, no, nor yet a five pound note, Niggs, into laying out their factories for the benefit of their people *only*; they put the money in because they know that they will get it back, in more efficient labour, many times over."

Andrew said, "Well? Well, what is wrong with that? It is your expectorating friend's, it is a criminal lunatic's way of looking at it, and, by God, I would be sorry to believe it is yours; but granting the point of view, it benefits both parties, doesn't it? What is wrong with it?"

Sim bent forward and touched Andrew's knee and smiled at him. "Don't get wild with me, Niggs. I am in a funny sort of state these days and I am only just feeling round these things and they startle me as much as they do you only in a different way. Don't get wild, Niggs."

Andrew gave the look he always had for Sim. "Tush; I don't get wild with you, Sim."

"Good old Niggs! I don't say about this that the workers, the Redskins — you don't mind that, do you?"

"Not a bit. Redskins and Palefaces; I think it is good; I told you so."

"I don't say that the Redskins don't get something out

of it; they do; a heap. All I am saying is that there is a lot of truth in what that chap, put it this way, in what that chap indirectly said — that the employer who wants to think that he does a lot for his people can't claim that by giving them the best possible working conditions he is doing it. Because he isn't, Niggs. What he does for them on those lines is not done first and last and wholly and solely for them; in some degree it is done for his own benefit also."

"What would you have him do?"

Sim for a little was silent. "Well, I don't quite know."

"Well, there we are then," said Andrew.

Sim drew himself forward to the edge of his chair. His cigar was finished and he bent over his clasped hands, arms on his knees, looking into the fire. He said slowly, "No; I do know in a way, Niggs; but as I said I am only just beginning to feel round these things and I can't fix them very well, especially in words. Niggs, whenever you hear business men, the kind of men I have been living with, your kind of men, you yourself, Niggs, whenever you hear them discussing a question as between themselves and their work people they always make it, and they always use the terms, a practical matter, or a personal matter, or a matter of principle, or a matter of business. Niggs, why — that is what I notice — why never a *human* matter?"

Andrew said drily: "What is the connection?"

Still with eyes upon the fire as though deep in some such crucible the secret lay, still with slow voice and as though through many obstacles he felt his way towards it: "Why, that every matter of that kind discussed affects somebody else, Niggs; someone who is not present; someone with no voice in that place; but, Niggs, someone *human*. That is the base of it; that is the base of everything, of every single thing, it seems to me; a

human base. Niggs, if everything has got a human base, why isn't everything looked at, discussed from, administered from the human standpoint?"

Andrew's tone was the dry and patient tone of a schoolmaster to a wandering pupil: "I meant the connection with what we were discussing — model workshops, wasn't it? done for the employes, as I say; done for profit as you and your expectorating friend affect to believe. Where is the connection there?"

Sim said, "Why, somewhere here, Niggs. I think this is what I am trying to say. These people, these employers, whatever they may do for their people, their *hearts* are not in it. Men like Ginnel, men like you, Niggs — I heard a lot when I was up there about things you had done for employes, sacking of bosses and reorganisation you did at the Western Amalgamated Iron place, a whole slum area you got Staverton to buy up and pull down and rebuild at Port Pittly — your kind of man and Ginnel's kind of man, the best kind. You are warm enough in your people's interests in your office hours, but, Niggs, it is *only* in your office hours that your heart is there. When you leave your desks you take your hearts with you."

"You take your hearts with you ——" As if the phrase were a path on which, nightbound and groping, he suddenly had stumbled; as if, stumbling upon it, confidence and swifter movement were given him, he faced Andrew full and spoke quickly: "You take your hearts with you. That is what I meant, Niggs, about everything being a bit wrong somewhere; and about there being truth in what that man said. The Palefaces rule well and they mean well; but when they leave their desks they take their hearts with them; when they put down their pens they put away the Redskins too. That is it, Niggs."

Andrew's voice exchanged its dryness for a sharpness:

"What do you expect them to do? Stay and wet-nurse the Redskin papooses?"

He gave down his nose a puff of amusement at his own humour; but Sim did not respond to the humour; he had struck a path and had had sudden confidence; but his bearings had not been struck and his brows were puzzled. "I don't quite know what I expect them to do. I don't quite know what they *can* do. That is my trouble, Niggs. That is as far as I have got. It is the human side of things that I am seeing. It isn't only in this Redskins and Palefaces business, it is in everything. I look at people, and in the newspapers I read about people, and I think about people, and, Niggs, I find myself looking, reading, thinking from the human side. That is vague, I know; it is devilish vague to me, let alone trying to explain it; but take Old Gand, take poor old Charles, well, I am seeing *them* differently. I think of times Old Gand has made me curse him and I think of times I have been utterly fed up with old Charles; well, I look at the human side, *their* side, and it looks — it looks mighty different, Niggs. It has puzzled me a lot the different way things have been presenting themselves to me the last few months. Now I know. It is the human side I am seeing. I know where I am now." He stopped.

There had been mounting in Andrew a growing anger at (as he termed it to himself) Sim's extraordinary rigmarole. He had been lazily uninterested, then playfully critical, then mildly hostile. Now he felt moved to be sharp and to make an end of it and the words that now came from Sim gave him his opening.

"That is as far as I have got," Sim said. "I know where I am now; but I don't know where I am going."

Andrew took the opening. "And I will be absolutely damned if I do," said Andrew.

The words went from him sharp as he could edge them.

Immediately he regretted the sharpness. This was Sim!

He leant quickly forward and held out his hand, "Sorry, Sim."

Sim grasped the hand and gave the Sim smile: "That's all right, Niggs; that's all right, old man."

CHAPTER XXVII

REDSKINS AND PALEFACES (III)

B. C. D. once told Elisabeth that if he had spent as much ingenuity in the construction of his plots as in the concealment of his movements he would not have brought down his grey hairs (but he had none) in sorrow to the Bodyguard. "My plots," he said, "would have been as obscure as the Bodyguard say is my style; no one would have looked twice at my books and I should be able to look the whole world in the face without having it turn around to look after me."

This the famous novelist pronounced on one of the many occasions on which he dictated to Elisabeth half-a-dozen or more letters each with the phrase and the parenthesis, "Tomorrow I think I am going away to (leave a blank, Miss Glade) for a bit"; and then "Fill in places for each of those blanks, will you, and just jot down a list of them; I got into rather a mess the other day through not knowing where I was supposed to be." The world-famous man never used the words "I am going" without putting the words "I think" before them; and it was containing his plans thus safety-valved that a letter awaited Sim on that evening of his return to London and of his talk with Andrew. It also contained a latchkey. "Miss Glade tells me you are back in town tomorrow," B. C. D. wrote. "I think I am going away for a bit tonight so here is my latchkey and the run of my rooms so that you can keep Miss Glade from picking and stealing." He had not stated where he was going but he added beneath his signature, "Please do not tell

anyone where I am going." Lardy Quinnet declared that no signature of the famous novelist could be considered genuine if without these words; and the famous novelist told Sim that he believed firmly that they would be found typed on his heart when he was dead.

He was gone — somewhere — when Sim, at Elisabeth's hour, went to his rooms on the morrow. Sim was a little early. He stared at B. C. D.'s neat bookshelves. At an end of one were ranged many folded ordnance maps; the famous novelist was a great walker and his methodical habits made him walk methodically. Sim's mind was bent on getting away somewhere; these maps were the keys for getting away of a man who made a profession of it; and Sim pulled one at random from the stack. There came with it an envelope on which was written in B. C. D.'s neat handwriting, "Places to bunk to." Sim smiled, "Just what I am in search of," he thought. In precise rows were names of places; none was familiar, and Sim had no doubt that that was their claim to selection. He used to himself a phrase of Lardy's which had caused him to laugh. "I'll draw a bow at a vulture," he said, and he closed his eyes and touched the paper with a finger. "Longfield," he read. "Where on earth is Longfield?" At the end of the maps was an A.B.C. Railway guide. He took it up. "Longfield Halt" was the only Longfield given and with it no trains but only a note: "Trains as for Barton Magna, stopping only by notice given to the guard. No up trains."

"Sounds buried enough," was Sim's thought; "I'll go there"; and he turned to Barton Magna, noted that it was in Westershire, noted a convenient train (there were but four a day) and when Elisabeth arrived told her. "Elisabeth, I am going to a place called Barton Magna; ever heard of it?"

Elisabeth never had; "But I am glad, Sim," she pres-

ently was saying; "that you are going to do this. It is what you feel that you want to do, isn't it?"

"Very much," Sim said.

"Then, Sim, I do feel that it is what you ought to do. There is a purpose for you, I am sure of it; and I am sure you best can find it by following, as in going away like this, impulses that come to you. Sim, your letters, every line of them, made me more and more certain of this purpose, whatever it may be, being behind you. All those things that you said, that you thought, the way in which you found yourself looking at everything — Sim, you know, they were not *like* you; they were not of your class, of your training; they were very extraordinary for you, Sim."

Sim's laugh was a little rueful. "I knew they were when I tried last night to tell them to Andrew."

She said, "Poor Sim!"

He took her hands: "That is where you are wonderful, Elisabeth."

She did not understand. "Where?"

"In saying just 'Poor Sim' like that; in understanding; in sympathising. Elisabeth, there were things that simply would not come to me with Andrew. They come with you."

She said, "Tell me."

He had said that they came with her yet he was not able at once to respond to her; when he spoke he spoke suddenly as a man bushed in a thicket suddenly will bring away an arm from the entangling brambles. "Why, that they should come with you who sympathise, and not with Andrew, who doesn't, somehow seems to be part of it. I don't see the connection. . . ." Entangled he halted; then came the sudden break-away: "Yes, I do see it. It is what I tried to say to Andrew, the human standpoint, the seeing with the other person's eyes, the sharing of the

other person's," he stopped for the word, then said, "burden. Yes, it is that. What I said to Andrew was that the Paleface bosses, the top dogs, do mean well by all the others, by the Redskins, and do rule well, but only when they are there, only when they are actually on the job. Elisabeth, their hearts are not in it, only their heads; when they leave their desks they take their hearts with them. What I could not say to Andrew, what I do not believe I knew, but what comes to me now, holding your hands ——"

She pressed his hands: "Dear Sim!"

He gave her back her pressure; faintly smiled; but she could see more deeply the intensity of his face, struggling in that thicket.

"What comes to me now is that it is not when they are at their desks that the Palefaces are judged by the Redskins, and it is not the — what is an example, Elisabeth? — and it is not when he is in his surplice that a clergyman is judged of his people, and not when he is lecturing him that a father is judged by his son, and not when one out of a million stops and does the Good Samaritan that the world is judged by a fallen; Elisabeth, it is when they are out about their common ways that people are judged. That man whom I talked to in the public house — I told you, you remember — divided us up into Workers and Spenders; and he gave me, bitter as acid, all this class-feeling that there is about; what else could he give me, a man who makes that division? But can't I see the reason of it! The reason of it just is that the Workers do not judge the Spenders as they see them at their desks, they judge them as they see them outside, gone off and taken their hearts with them to where their hearts really beat — where the luxury, and the pleasure and the waste and the leisure is; floating about in cars and the Workers splashed by the mud; in restaurants and as

much gone in a nod to the waiter as the Workers can earn in a week; in warm and lovely houses, in padded clubs, all that, and the Worker outside where the rain and the wind is. *That* is where the Workers judge the Spenders and that is whence comes the hatred, the creation of Haves and Havenots."

He turned to her more closely.

"Elisabeth, talk like that is just the talk of any street-corner red flag man; there is a heap of rubbish in it as plain talk; it is just a contrast of extremes and while you have got extremes you must have contrasts; Nature has, there is night and day, land and sea, plain and forest. Elisabeth, it is not the fact of the contrast that is wrong; it is the *way* of the contrast. It is the taking-their-hearts-with-them-when-they-leave-their-desks that makes the trouble. If those Spenders, in their cars, from their restaurant tables, from their houses, their clubs, their parties, from the midst of any and of all their heart-interests, could in a manner of speaking look up and give a smile and a nod to the Workers outside, the Workers wouldn't mind a bit being outside; they would know that, though those Spenders' bodies did not live where *their* bodies live their hearts were with them. They would know they were not regarded as, out of office hours, they know they are regarded, as a race apart, a race that has its own stables and that occupies the real lives of the Spenders no more than any stabled creature occupies them. Mind you, the Redskins *are* helped by the Palefaces; charities and new social laws and wider social ideas come from Paleface to Redskin and help him much. The most flagrant of the Spenders will give generously to help him, and the most rooted of the old political schools will subscribe to new laws, new ideas to help him. But, Elisabeth, the Redskins are helped *as a class;* they are helped in office hours only. There is no human help, no heart

help, and there never will be until the whole idea of help, class to class, individual to dependents, man to man, is not to help class, dependent, stranger solely, but to help humanity largely, mankind as one; the one that we all are, richest and poorest, ablest and dullest, best and worst, strongest and weakest."

He stopped. He said, "Elisabeth, when I say help, human help, heart help, help every one to every other, I mean my hand, a Paleface hand, clean, trimmed, in my neighbour's hand, a Redskin's hand, grimed, broken; your hand, white, soft, in the next woman's hand, worn, rough."

Envisioned by his earnestness: "Oh, Sim," she breathed.

He said after a moment, "I told Andrew that is where I am; but I couldn't tell him the tithe of it. *That* is where I am, Elisabeth. It isn't anything definite, it's all indefinite; it isn't anything practical, it's all — it all seems to me — utterly impracticable; but what I feel somehow is that in these past months, ever since that began to happen to me in the war, the truth that is in me has been working itself out, coming out to me, realising itself in me. That is where I am, Elisabeth — but I don't know where I am going."

She said, "Sim, I think you are going to be true to yourself."

He muttered, "It is vague, that."

She said, "It is not vague, Sim. Truth to oneself is not an indefinite going. It is a going very high. I think truth to oneself is about as high as a man can get."

He was gone over to the fireplace and stood, back to her, his chin on his hand. He seemed to shake his head.

She said, "Sim, you said 'impracticable' those thoughts of yours; I believe that truth to yourself can make all things practicable. Sim, I believe that if a man

can get as high as truth to himself he is high enough for heaven to reach down and help him."

His shoulders made a movement of shaking off a touch. His voice came: "Ah, that is — that is that 'Of God' stuff. I don't think about that."

She said, "Sim, that was an astonishing expression you wrote to me. 'I believe that God is *after* me,' you said."

He put his arms on the mantelpiece before him and his forehead down on them. He raised his right foot and drubbed with his toe on the carpet. . . .

Suddenly his hands pushed him from his pose and upright; and he turned and came quickly to where she sat on the couch.

"Elisabeth, I am frightfully perplexed," he said.

She gave him her hands, "Dear Sim!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALICE AND LINDA

When he was in the train, his ticket to Barton Magna in his pocket, his trunk in the baggage van, his small kit bestowed about him — for "I am clearing right out, Niggs," he had told Andrew. "I am goose-chasing but I am going to catch that goose"— he was thinking, during much of the journey, of Linda and of Alice. Linda, surprisingly, had come to see him off and at the door of his carriage immediately before the train moved had spoken surprisingly. Alice, as surprisingly encountered on the previous evening, also had spoken strangely; and the odd thing, further, was that both Linda and Alice in taking leave of him had used the same phrase and had broken it off precisely at the same place.

Strange, Sim thought; but as the train bore him on he pondered in each case, not the phrase, but its context.

Alice had been met at Stupendity's. He had looked in there after leaving Elisabeth for some purchases before he left town and he had got himself wedged, as every visitor to Stupendity's got wedged, in the mob that stood about the lifts. Eight lifts, side by side, shot up and down ceaselessly all day at Stupendity's; but it was Sim's experience that, with all the Stupendity organisation, the lifts invariably appeared all to be shooting either in the direction the mob did not wish to go or, without stopping, at great speed in the direction the mob did wish to go. He was standing, wedged, with the thought that he must speak to Lardy Quinnet about this, when he

heard a voice immediately behind him say, " Alice, I think we had better not wait."

He turned quickly. Immediately behind him were Alice and Conrad Bryne. It seemed certain that it must have been Conrad Bryne who had spoken; but it could not, Sim told himself, have been for Bryne could not have called Charles's wife Alice; but the faces of both displayed an amazing confusion on seeing him; and Sim when he left them, and now in the train, pondered that confusion that he had seen. Now he thought of it he remembered during his stay with Charles . . . but that was ridiculous . . . but was it . . .? It persisted. . . .

Alice was up for some shopping, she explained, and right in this very crowd had run into Dr. Bryne. Wasn't it curious? And now, the two of them, into him. *Wasn't* it curious? Her manner was extraordinarily perturbed. They both were catching the 6.10 home, she said, and, if they meant to, simply must fly for it; no use whatever waiting for this wretched lift; down the stairs would be quicker, she thought.

" Me too," Sim said. " We'll never get in when a lift does come; " and together they withdrew.

A convulsion of the mob had staggered Conrad Bryne from them while Alice was speaking. He rejoined them on the outskirts of the crowd and walked down the stairs with Sim, Alice in front. " Extraordinary these meetings," he said. " I had run into Mrs. Paris not ten minutes before, in the entrance, just as I was coming in."

Alice was descending just in front of them. Sim saw the contour of her face encrimson. Bryne's story of their meeting was not the same as hers had been.

He stood with the two on the pavement outside while they waited their bus. Conrad Bryne went to the kerb and looked along the road for their number. He made a considerable show of his occupation, getting on tiptoe,

going out a few steps, peering around other advancing busses. His manner was not easy.

"I am off tomorrow," Sim told Alice.

She put a quick hand on his arm. "Oh, Sim, where?"

He told her.

She had left her hand where she touched him. In the lamplight her face looked astonishingly pale, appealing. He felt her fingers press.

"Oh, I am sorry you are going," she said.

He smiled. "But we never see one another, Alice."

"But you have been, I had hoped you always would be, here, in reach."

She looked away, as if embarrassed. She looked at Conrad Bryne, bus-watching, as though she was very interested in what he was doing and was not interested in what she was saying. But she was interested in what she was saying. She gave Sim her eyes again. "You will be sure to send me your address, Sim."

"Rather, Alice."

He felt the fingers on his arm close. "At once, Sim. The minute you know it."

"At once, rather." He laughed. "It is nice to be wanted like this."

She gave no responding smile. "Oh, you are wanted," she said, "more than you think, Sim; you ——"

"This is us," came Conrad Bryne's voice. "We had better hustle, Mrs. Paris."

Alice said, "Sim, I *wish* you were not going. There is a — a strength about you, Sim, you cannot know; and I ——"

She broke her sentence and turned and was helped by Bryne to struggle a place into the bus.

Then Linda.

Linda who normally never appeared before mid-day presented herself at breakfast that morning and told why.

"Going to see you off, Sim. If I hadn't come down, ten to one you'd have changed your mind and not gone. When a good riddance to bad rubbish *does* come into my life I like to make sure of it."

"You can make sure on your own wretched doorstep," Sim said. "You needn't come crying all over me in the cab."

"Ah, you don't slip me that way, young man," said Linda. "Don't think it. When a good riddance to bad rubbish *does* come into my life I take mighty good care to be there for the last possible push. Wipe your mouth after you have drunk tea and let me get on with my letters."

She was in particularly rattling spirits as the cab took them to the station. She was in form even gayer as she stood looking up at him while he leaned from the window of his compartment in the train. She looked at her wrist-watch and at the clock. "It is after the time. My belief, and *just* my luck, the dashed engine is stuck and you won't go after all."

"Oh, heaven forbid," Sim said. The train moved. "Ah, saved! We're off!"

The laughter went from her eyes, the rattle from her tongue, as though in a room of mirth, light and jolly music suddenly had been cut off. She said in an extraordinary voice, "Sim, I wish *to God* you were not going."

"Linda!"

She had bitten on her lower lip. "Sim, what do you think of me?"

"The jolliest, and the loveliest, that ever."

She was walking with the train, holding his hand.

"You think all fun, all rattle. Sim, sometimes Andrew looks at me, and I have a feeling ——" She was caused to release his hand. She squeezed it. "I wish

to God you were not going;" and then she used the very words that Alice had used. "Sim, there is a — a strength about you you cannot know, and I ——"

She dropped his hand and stood away.

He waved to her. She was touching her eyes with her handkerchief.

He sat back and thought of her and of Alice.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE COTTAGE

His mind went to Elisabeth, and with Elisabeth, to this extraordinary step he now was taking. With all his worldly possessions he was coming to a place of which he had never previously heard; and he was coming because he could settle to nothing and had the feeling that down here, down anywhere so long as alone and quiet somewhere, he could think out things a bit; and the feeling, more narrowly defining his position than that, that if he could be quiet and think he would get towards this Purpose that mysteriously was influencing him. But if this had been a little time ago, before the war, before his own especial events of the war, he could have imagined nothing more utterly out of keeping with his character and with his tastes than thus to be forsaking London when he might be in London, thus to be travelling to isolation when he might be travelling to the noisiness and fun of a country house party. Extraordinary! And yet if he suddenly could be granted one wish, if, even now — influenced and changed as he was and, under those influences and changes, taking this step that he was taking — one wish suddenly could be granted him, he would wish, not to have revealed to him the object of this "purpose", but to be so circumstanced that he might marry Elisabeth. There could be no granted wish, but a wish, almost as certainly as by supernatural granting, can be won by working for it; and yet he was not working for his wish; he was leaving it; it was this purpose of his that he was pursuing. Strange!

He had taken no thought, profound in his reflections, of the passage of time or countryside; he was startled, as a slowing up aroused his attention, to see on the name-board of a station Barton Magna.

"Getting out here, sir?" asked a porter through the window.

"You may well ask," said Sim, hurriedly collecting. "I jolly nearly missed it. You can shove these things in the cloak-room, will you, and I have a box in the van."

Barton Magna, as he came out of the station, presented itself to him as a picturesque old town standing, length without breadth, on either side of a turnpike highway, and giving somehow the suggestion of having deposited itself house by house, on each flank of two notable inns, the Crown and the Bull which faced one another at the street's centre. A legend, as Sim afterwards learnt, accounted for the slightly unusual proximity of these rival establishments; but each had historical proof in the form of old way-bills and journey books that in the coaching days the down coach from London pulled up always at the Crown, the up-coach always at the Bull. It was a street, thought Sim, looking at one of these way-bills framed in the window of the Crown, that would have made an exact setting for a coach and four; but there were signs both in Crown and in Bull that tourist motor-cars, not coaches and four, now had their custom; and Sim, who had a bed to find, had a distaste for finding it in motor-car company surroundings.

It had been a swift two-hour run from London. The hour was twelve; the day stood in the end of March, sun and a clear sky overhead; and as he pressed along, stick in hand, glad in the freedom of road after constraint of train; and as he came to cross-roads and glanced along them; early Spring, bold beneath the clement rule of a mild Winter, peeped at him from the hedgerows. He

looked up at the lateral arms of the signpost by which he stood. Leftwards were indicated Barton Monkhouse, Barton End, and Longfield; to the right Barton Abbas, Shifney, and Stowhurst.

"They're fond of Barton hereabouts," was his comment. "But it's me for Longfield."

Air, sun, the road, feel of the stick in his hand, shook off for him the confinement of his thoughts on the journey; he set up his shoulders, swung his stick and blithely went at it. His by-road, like a child leaving stern elders, kept straight while under the severe eye of the turnpike, ducked round a sudden corner, twisted quickly again, and thereafter, free, pranked here and there, this way and that, in jolly bends that were altogether delightful to him. He remembered B. C. D., that great walker, telling him out in France that to follow the winding English lanes was to walk precisely where first the Saxon footmen had trod a path — around this marshy hollow, around that clump of thorns, around this patch of trees; and next the packhorses following the track had been led; and so the road trodden in and established; and he took to himself that thought ("I always have those bygone chaps walking with me and passing me," B. C. D. had said) and beneath its captivation swung along, beckoned by each capricious turn and glad to be beckoned; led through country he thought glorious and not less glorious that leafless tree and scarcely budding hedge gave his eye vistas that summer months, if decorating, would decorate but to occlude. He was walking, as he saw, along the slopes of a wide valley. Westward downland climbed away in gentle contours; eastward, across the vale, a chain of hills upheld the sky; along the valley he caught glimpses of a river. Church spires stood here and there, their settlements about them; away on his right he saw the towered outline of what seemed to be a considerable residence, parked, wooded;

to his left there seemed, in its straight line, to partner it another stately mansion; he already could detect in that direction the model fencing that spoke of some well cared for property of great extent.

The road with more capricious wriggle yet went almost S shaped through a pleasant village. A water mill ran here and the hood of a wagon standing outside a granary showed him "George Ullyet, Barton End" and told him that another of the Barton family had been walked down. It was just after one o'clock; he was more in mood for walking than for meal; and Longfield, that hiding-place of B. C. D.'s "to bunk to" lay yet ahead and was his quest's first aim.

But he did not reach Longfield. There stopped him on his road, as he went further on, a cottage that he thought dropped with its surroundings from the sketch-book of some artist who first had found the cottage that all sketchbooks seek, then had idealised it. Sim knew nothing about period cottages nor, stopping to look at this, desired to be told. He saw in it only the simple structure of some simple mind whose apprentices, rounding off his work, had been wind, sun and rain. He saw a roof of mellowed thatch; walls of brick of deepest red; two massive doors framed in great timbers yet more massive; wide, low windows ranged to show two floors; some out-buildings; a bricked path, mossy between its stones, coming down the garden towards him. These took his eye, and that the house, though long enough to suggest two cottages, had somehow the appearance of being but one; his mind received a picture of an exquisite tranquillity.

He thought: "Now *that* is where I would like to ——"

It came into his mind that B. C. D., experienced tramper, would make nothing of enquiring if a bed might be had here. He did not know that the super-famous

novelist, as many nights as not, had hung forlornly about the lone dwellings screwing up courage, been driven to the touch by dusk, driven away by not having his knock heard and timidity of knocking louder, driven into a barn by night and out again by rats. Not knowing this, he thought that what B. C. D. could do he would not be eaten for doing; and he opened the gate, went to the nearer door, and tried, as he said to himself, his luck.

His luck was in. He took an immediate fancy to the face of the woman who opened the door to him, a woman of about sixty, of a countenance worn yet singularly mild as though much battering of elements had here a surface which, in despite of disturbing, they had settled down to smooth. He liked her. But with the action of opening to him she took a swift glance over his appearance and he was astonished to see a look of very troubled apprehension, of fear, stand within her eyes; and she spoke first.

"Have you come from Mr. Hignett, sir?"

"I have not," Sim said; and saw with new surprise immense relief upon her face.

"I thought you must have, sir, looking at you," she said. "But even though you've not, it is my duty to tell to all the like of you that this cottage"—her voice faltered a note—"is for sale, sir."

Sim gave the friendly Sim laugh. "By jove, I wish I could buy it," he said. "No, I only wanted to ask you——"

She had seemed to hold her breath while she awaited his reply. When she had it, new relief came into her face; and she said very warmly, "Ah, won't you step inside, sir?"

He accepted her welcome, entering a kitchen, equipped and shining — pewter, brass, black oak, a fire of logs — just as it might have been equipped and have shone two centuries ago. He knew perfectly well now the cause of

her agitation; she was in dread her house was to be sold; and looking about him he well could understand her dread.

She went to a door standing on his left as he had entered and opened it. "You better had come in here, sir; it is but my kitchen this; and 'tis my duty the like of you should see the best."

Sim followed her. "I say, that's a room!" was his exclamation.

It was beamed above, panelled about; an immense fireplace, twin to that he had seen in the kitchen, stood in the great thickness of the wall through which he had entered; a range of latticed windows was on his left, flush with the second of the doors he had seen from the road; their replica faced them across the room, and windows again, having a very deep seat, matching in construction the great hearth, stood opposite the fireplace; against the right hand window a stairway climbed. Taking all in, "This *is* a room!" he said again.

The woman was pleased. "'Tis pleasant," she said. "'Tis 'visitors room' as we call it, my Yeoman and me, us not having cause for to use this part, nor the rooms above, and that is 'visitors door', as we say, though sad fear we have —" she smiled at him —"of visitors coming to it."

Her smile won his. "If I were you, I'd not let a soul see it, nor your kitchen either for that matter. You are worrying someone will buy the place, I can tell that ——"

She sighed, "We surely are, my Yeoman and me."

Yeoman, he thought, must be her dog. "But showing it all like this," he said. "Why ask me in? You throw it at people."

"Why, 'tis my duty, sir," she said. "That is the 'greement that we may bide, my Yeoman and me, that we keep all this —" she gestured a hand about the room —"to

rights and do our level utmost for to show and to attract all of the likes of you." A bowl of flowers from which two leaves had fallen stood on a central table whose surface gleamed in deep black pool. She picked up the leaves, touched the flowers here and there to their better display and with a cloth she held in her hand polished the pool whereon the leaves had floated. "'Tis duty," she said simply.

An ennobled sense of duty, Sim thought; match to the simple beauty of her face. "What I ventured in for," he said, and hesitated a little over his words, "was to wonder whether I could get a bed here for a night; in fact, seeing that you have these rooms, for a bit longer; a lodging for a little time?"

Her answer delighted him; "Why, we never have done it, sir, my Yeoman and me; but that's for that we've never had no offer for to do it. These surely are anxious days for us, not knowing when our roof must change, nor where to find another, and welcome for to put by the few shillings we might ask would be." She smiled at him. "And if 'tis not bold, sir," she added, "there is this more to it that I like thy face."

"Why, I like yours," said Sim.

She smiled again delightfully. "Would you best first see the room above?"

"I would like to," Sim told her; and told her, as at her request he preceded her up the stairway, "not that I mind tuppence what it is like after what I have seen down here"; but saw the bedroom into which they came and expressed himself, as he was, further enchanted.

He spoke of terms and these were easy; of returning to Barton Magna for his traps, and found it as easy to agree to her suggestion that first she should give him a bite of lunch. While she set out cold sundries on the table in her kitchen —"more cosy here with fire and I will

put light in other hearth while you be gone —" he walked in an extraordinary sense of happiness about the room that was to be his. This place, everything about it, every aspect of it, caused in him that sense of high content, a mingling of satisfaction and of elation, that comes solely with some task well achieved, a day well spent, a duty well performed. He best could liken it in his own case to the glorious feeling, mental and physical, with the first pipe and stretch before the fire after a tremendous match in his old football days. He had set out that morning aimlessly; he had achieved an aim better than any he could have imagined. For sale! The things one could do with and in a place like this! Well, at least it was his for the few days he might be here. Not since the first stirrings within him of the unrest which had caused him to leave the army and sent him adrift had he felt, as he felt now, so (his mind emphasised the word) — *suited.*

"'Tis ready now, sir," he heard the voice from the kitchen and he went to it very happily.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TELEGRAM

THE woman was leaving the kitchen by a further door as he entered it. "I'll draw thee pot of ale, sir;" he noticed and liked the occasional thee's and thou's; and in a moment she was back with it, its foaming head pressing up from a pewter, ice cold when he poured it out.

He remembered that his address must be sent to Elisabeth, to Alice, to Andrew. "The cottage has a name?" he questioned.

"Old Ballard's 'tis called," she told him; and he liked the place the more for the pleasant sound of the name, more yet for the associations he could read into it when she told him it so was called because "family of Ballard" had lived here generation on generation since first a Ballard, building it, had grown to be Old Ballard in it.

"I like the sound of that," he said, "and the thought of it. Old Ballard's is the cottage, then, but I don't know your name yet. Mine is Paris."

"Same like the town in France, sir?"

"Same like that little town," Sim said gravely.

"Yeoman is mine, sir," she told him.

Again the sound of a name rejoiced him. How all things here seemed to maintain the atmosphere and the content he had out of that atmosphere! Old Ballard's this abode of rural, lovely, ancient peace; Yeoman this type of gentle courteous country stock; name racy of the soil, and, in its owner's calm, worn face, in that simple interpretation of hers of what was meant by duty, breath-

ing the placid virtues, the stable integrity of England's earth. But Yeoman? "Me and my Yeoman" as she had frequently spoken? Clearly no dog, as he had thought, but kin. He wanted to discover this identity, sought in his mind for a way to put the question, and unwittingly received the answer without doing so.

The cloth she had set for him covered only half the table. Beside it stood a lamp and beside the lamp a very large and extraordinarily thick and clumsily leaved book. Debating the form of his question, he put out a hand and twisted the back of the volume towards him: "Gospel According to St. Matthew: Braille" he read. Braille? The type the blind read? Someone here was blind? He looked up. Her eyes had followed his, and he said questioningly "Braille?"

"Ay, that is my Yeoman's," she said. "My Yeoman is blind," she added softly.

The caress of her voice, its implication of a very great tenderness, made the right comment a little difficult to find.

"That is sad," Sim said.

"But he surely is wonderful," she told him. "You never would know it, not to see him." Her voice in these proud affirmations had been strong again. "He is my brother, Yeoman," she said; and again her voice was dropped to that uncommon tenderness; and again by the tenderness right comment was made a little difficult.

"Ah, yes," Sim said. "And just you two here, just your brother and you?"

"And has been twenty year," she said; "daily since ever this lightness came over him."

She meant, of course, darkness, Sim thought; and in correction "Lightness?" he smiled at her.

She smiled return. "'Tis custom of saying it," she said. "Affliction he will not have it called, nor darkness

neither; my Yeoman. His eyes were opened when his eyes were closed he says." She touched the Braille gospel. "Meaning of that, of God, sir," she said.

He had nothing to say to that; associations disturbing to him were in the phrase "of God" and he was in mood too content to invite disturbance. In advantage of his silence, "I will go tell my Yeoman of thee," she said; "I've had no minute yet." She went to the further door; and as she left him "You will think that strange, the calling of my brother by our name of family," she smiled to him. "'Tis of hearing him ever so called, same as I am Margaret to all, when we worked, him and me, him in the fields, me within, for the great house in the Barton time. 'Tis custom did it; but 'tis odd to strangers."

Sim smiled at her. "I like it very much as you say it; 'My Yeoman'; it sounds good to me."

She was pleased. "Well, I will go tell him of thee. Name of Paris, sir?"

"Name of Paris," smiled Sim, and she was gone; and almost immediately, his meal finished, he also was in the garden giving himself before he went for his luggage a swift look around. It all was wonderfully attractive to him; all to the picture; all to the profound sense of contentment that the interior had given him. He saw from the small lawn and kitchen garden in the rear gates opening to small orchard and to paddock; he saw and entered a roomy, disused stable —"Only wants a horse," was his thought; then he heard voices in the coach-house that adjoined and went to them.

The door stood open; Margaret Yeoman was here and here was a carpenter's workshop, bench, tools, and at the back a wide and low rustic seat, newly stained.

From this seat, as Sim advanced, there turned towards him, chisel in hand, an old man, Margaret Yeoman standing beside him.

"Ah, here is the gentleman," Margaret Yeoman exclaimed, and to Sim "My Yeoman, sir."

An inscription, a line of lettering, ran along the top of the rustic seat. The old man, who seemed to have been working on the letters, now crossed directly to the carpenter's bench, laid down his chisel, took up a piece of cloth, wiped his hands, stepped carefully around a trestle which stood between him and the entrance and approaching Sim took without groping or fumble the hand which Sim extended.

Setting down, picking up, avoiding, finding, all with precision and ease, could he indeed be blind? Sim thought.

"But he surely is wonderful," Margaret had said of his blindness and most wonderful Sim thought the perfect certainty of movement with which he had come from his occupation to his greeting. "You never would know it, not to see him," she had said; and to watch those actions, setting down and picking up without fumble, avoiding without groping, his hand straight to Sim's without falter, impossible indeed to believe that he was blind. His eyes, very blue, were open, had no suggestive look and moved, while the three spoke, from one to the other precisely as if he saw them. He was clearly much older than his sister, a man of eighty, as Sim was to learn. He was middle-height, bent with that ponderous stoop of massive shoulders above a powerful chest, so different from the city desk-man's feeble stoop. He was clean-shaven. His face had, as his sister's had, but in degree more marked, that smooth and placid look, gleaming and suggestive of transparency, that is presented at the base of cliffs by rocks submerged at every tide; not fretted, scarred, abraised as are those others higher placed that still resent and spurn the stress of the persistent sea. He had the look of a man who stands at evening in his door-

way, the day's work done; wide space before him; within, his house in order.

Sim took the conversation at once to his delight in this their cottage. "Ay, 'tis our home," old Yeoman said, pronouncing the word home as though therein all that was desirable was comprehended and causing Sim to remember, in another talk of England with B. C. D., being told that in the language of no other nation was there an equivalent for home as the British mean it. The house, he now further heard, was of the Barton estate, all the Barton villages comprising the property. They had lived in it, the pair, ever since by an accident the old man's blindness had come to him. Twelve years they solely had occupied it; then had died the last of the Bartons of the great house who had kept them there; the estate had been sold; its purchaser had restored the two cottages, making them one, to their present condition and in it had installed his agent, a bachelor, the Yeomans attending his wants. Now the agent had married, was away these weeks on his honeymoon, was returning to a larger residence and this, no longer required by him, was to be sold, the Yeomans suffered to remain until sale should be effected on that condition which Margaret Yeoman so well fulfilled as "'tis duty."

Sim thought the case hard. Using the term used by them, "Why should the great house sell the place?" he asked; and was told in explanation that all Barton End, in which it stood, was being cut away from the estate and put on the market.

"And the great house," he questioned, "that is out that way, I suppose?" and pointed in the direction in which on his walk he had seen a towered residence across the valley. "That castle looking sort of place, eh?"

As if he could see the extended arm, "Nay, Chesney Towers that way," old Yeoman said, "yonder is the great

house," and he indicated with his head the quarter behind him.

Chesney Towers, Sim was told, formerly in ruins, had been lavishly converted into a residence by one who had sought to restore to it the splendours that it had had aforetime. "Drawbridge and all, and all the old customs done there now, so they do say," Margaret Yeoman told him; and when he asked who owned it was told "A great London gentleman and with that great shop that is in the papers so frequent, Mr. Stupendity."

Sim with "*Does* he?" gave to the fact no more than the polite interest of the "*Is* it?" with which the charabanc tourist responds to the information of a persistent guide; and inquired as to the great house. "Ah, that's Longfield way," he was told, and was able to see in the Longfield Halt of the railway guide, where trains stopped only by command, the convenience of the great man who owned the property. But when the property's name and its owner was told him he received that which sheerly astonished him.

"'Tis Staverton Park," old Yeoman said; and Sim exclaimed, "Staverton Park! What, Lord Staverton's place? Lord Staverton lives there?"

"Ay, Lord Staverton, be sure."

It was extraordinary!

"If you are going to Barton Magna, sir——" Margaret Yeoman was saying to him.

"I very much am," said Sim. With the coincidence of Andrew's chief having here his country seat — frequently Andrew had written to him from it — owning this very cottage on which he had so happily chanced, had come to him an idea wildly audacious, wildly tempting. "I very much am," he repeated.

"Why then," continued Margaret, "here is one would run you there quick."

Sim looked to her pointing and saw at the gate a baker's motor delivery van, its driver coming with his basket up the path. The arrangement was made for him; he presently was speeding over the road he had walked; very soon was in the town.

"Are you from Mr. Hignett?" had been Miss Yeoman's words when she had opened her door to him; and "Do you know a man in Barton Magna called Hignett?" he had asked the baker as they drove.

"Ay, 'twould be Mr. Hignett, the house agent."

"That's the man!" said Sim and almost quivered.

He was set down at a tiny office, the half of a divided shop; opposite the post office, as he noticed. Within was a rather affected looking young man engaged in attending to his hands by paring his nails and to his feet by warming them at an oil stove. The reek of the stove caused Sim to give a "woof!" of disfavour as he entered; and the woof of disfavour caused the young man to assume that superior indifference which is kept by every house agent within handy reach.

"I have been looking at a place of yours, of Lord Staverton's," Sim said; "a cottage, Old Ballard's at Barton End; what would Lord Staverton take for it?"

The significant words, "take for it", significant of a purse ill-prepared, caused the house agent to fit himself more firmly into his professional robe. "The *price* of that property," said he, delivering the word with acid rebuke, "is £700."

Sim made again the mental balancing of his ledgers which he had made a dozen times coming along the road. Active service throughout the whole of the war had kept him from spending money; his gratuity had added to his savings; almost precisely £700 stood, he estimated, to his credit.

"Yes, but what would he *take,* I am asking?" he said.

The house agent bent to adjust the wick of the stove. "He would take," he said, bent, "the price, £700."

"Would he take £500?"

"He certainly would not," said the house agent, "nor yet six." He drew a catalogue towards him and indifferently turned the leaves. "The Staverton estates," he said, "do not entertain offers."

Sim smiled cheerfully. "Well, you don't seem to entertain fresh air," he said, "but it doesn't follow you won't get it. I'll leave the door open."

He went out, briskly across the road, heard the door slammed violently behind him, and entered the post office. This was Andrew's day and hour to be in the Fenchurch Street offices. He looked at the clock; just after three. He could get a reply in two hours — less. He wrote a telegram.

"Get Staverton to sell me Old Ballard's cottage here for £500. I want it, Niggs. Reply immediately Barton Magna Post Office."

He went to the station and arranged for a cab to take him and his belongings to Barton End. He passed the best part of an hour about the town in the ancient Guildhall and elsewhere; there was a fine church but for a reason he would not define to himself he would not enter the church; the best part of another over tea in the Crown. Time did not drag; he was keenly excited and it went swiftly. Shortly before five he went to the post office. Yes, there was a telegram for him. Andrew's imperturbable nature, never surprised, never inquisitive, was in the two words which solely it contained.

"It's yours."

Sim gave a short laugh.

"Well, I *have* done a mad thing!"

CHAPTER XXXI

HABITATION

But mad nor wild, reckless nor foolish, he had not room to feel it when, returned, he paced about the apartment that now was his own apartment, the habitation that now was his own habitation. An extraordinary fullness of completion, of tranquillity, of settlement possessed him; there was room in him for no thought other.

In the evening he wrote to Elisabeth. There was immense amount to tell and he was long and intimate in the telling. "It is an amazing thing for me to have done but ——" That sentence was recurrent; its "but" led on to testimony on testimony that, if amazing, it amazed also with the convincing seemliness of it all to the mood in which he had come here. When he had told of the emotion with which the Yeomans had received his news —" when I had made them understand that of course the foundation of the whole thing was for them to live on here and look after me I simply had to clear out and leave them their happiness was so embarrassing "— when this had been described,

"The old man," he wrote, "is a quite wonderful carpenter — no, much higher grade than carpenter, woodworker is more the word. You would think it impossible in a blind man; his sense of touch and the love that he brings to it makes him sheer artist. Do you know that from a thing he is doing I have suddenly — almost as I write — the glimmer of an idea of something that I shall do down here — design for him and help him make (I have a turn for carpentry, you know) bits of furniture!

He is himself making something (I will tell you of it in a minute) that does absolutely *express* what he means it to be; and you know that is what the great periods of furniture (a thing I have always been mildly interested in) did, they *expressed* something. Elisabeth, I believe I could express this present day period of ours somehow in furniture design, this period of England as she rose to the war; as she stood sort of four square to it, in hell to her waist, her brow to the stars. It is just an idea, of course, come almost as I write, as I have said, and probably has nothing in it and is absurdly beyond me. (A lark, though, if my 'purpose' turned out to be that I became a Sheraton or a Chippendale or one of those chaps!)

"But what I was going to say is that what old Yeoman is after is making wayside seats to put on the hilly roads about here. He has done one and is working on another. There are five 'main toiling' hills about here and it is five seats he purposes to do. 'My work for the weary ones,' he told me; 'and then maybe I shall climb my hill,' he said. Elisabeth, don't you think there is something rather beautiful in the idea? He gets, of course, no pay for the seats; it is just — if ever there was one — a labour of love. I went, after he had told me, to see the one he had completed and placed; about a mile from here and all up hill and it *is* a hill, I can tell you. It was getting dark but the moon was up and I could see it clearly: one of those big 'rustic' seats, as they are called; you know the kind; but fashioned differently, somehow, uncommonly low, uncommonly deep and the lines of the timbers quite remarkably graceful. The whole thing seemed to suggest, invite, speak 'rest'; and it was this most striking suggestiveness that put in my mind the possibilities of furniture-design of which I have written. He had told me landmarks of his other four hills that could be

seen from there and I made them out; and imaging a seat like this on each of them, and imaging the grateful sighs with which, in the years, countless wayfarers would sink on them, I did think it a beautiful memorial that this old man was spending the evening of his days in making to leave behind him. B. C. D. out in France, in our talks (arising so often out of your beloved letters) used to ravish me with Shakespeare's sonnetts (have I spelt sonnett right?). One line I always remember:—

> Not marble nor the gilded monuments
> Of Princes . . .

Old Yeoman's monument, done gloriously in glorious oak, will bring him more blessings than all the gilt and marble ever erected could invoke. Elisabeth, it is rather a beautiful idea, isn't it? And listen; along the back of each seat he is carving — where could he have got it from? invented it? Well, I can believe that a thought as lovely as set him to do this thing, easily could have merged into his mind as he worked that lovely other thought that he has carved there:—

> REST, PASSER-BY, THEN CHEERLY ON:
> PEACE ON THY HABITATION, PASSER-BY."

He finished his writing there. He sat a long time looking at the inscription he had copied. "Peace on thy habitation, Passer-by." The sentiment, in the strange circumstances that had brought him to be here, affected him profoundly and with an especial appositeness. Passer-by of this habitation he had been; sojourner he hoped to be; passer-by, beneath impulse of his mysterious purpose, of callings that he might have adopted he had been; apprenticeship to some peace might he here find?

There came to him at intervals through the dividing door the murmur of old Yeoman's voice; from the sister, curiously, no response that he could hear. He got up and went into the kitchen and was made free of the reason. Margaret Yeoman sat by the fire at some knitting. At the table was old Yeoman, his Braille Gospel before him, his fingers working upon it. He spent every evening thus, the two told him. He read to himself till now, their bedtime; when that arrived he had a pleasure in "finding messages", three for his sister, three for himself. He found them by closing the volume, inserting in it a paper knife he had, and the "message" was the text his fingers read at the point of the knife.

Sim said lightly, it seemed to him, as showing an interest, the thing to say:

"You had better find me a message, Yeoman."

The old man was very glad to. He closed the volume, inserted his knife, opened at the place, and put his fingers to the blade's point. The shock of his first two words caused Sim to lose the two immediately following. Old Yeoman's deep voice read:

"One Simon . . . him they compelled to bear His cross."

PART TWO

IN HOPE

CHAPTER I

INCIDENCE

Now in a habitation of his own, Sim Paris began to gather there about him pursuits and occupations. He developed, greatly surprising himself by his facility, that idea of furniture design of which he had written to Elisabeth; he got a horse ("What's he want a horse for?"—Charles); he came to know families resident round about the Barton villages; and to Staverton Park and to Chesney Towers came at intervals older friends.

Lord Staverton made weekend visits to his country seat, Andrew with him, and, when he entertained there, Linda with Andrew. He gave Sim, for Sim's riding, the run of Staverton Park and here were had by Sim great gallops not possible along the winding lanes, through the beech woods, over the bridle-paths where daily, loose-reined, he ambled; thoughts browsing. Also was at his disposal the Pool, that great lake within the Staverton pleasaunce where Miss Marr might have pointed out a coot in living fact. There was a skiff here Sim could use; and there were summer nights, holding, distilled amongst their airs and dews, beneath the starry veils of scarcely separated dusk and dawn, the incense of the foison of the year, when he would spend the night through gliding upon the bosom of the mirrored skies, thoughts and surmises stealing through his mind as stole the ripples from his gently moving craft; transient (it seemed to him) as they.

Over at Chesney Towers, Mr. Stupendity's visits almost a weekend certainty, were gatherings of great distinction

in the guests who came with him from town, of flattered gratification in the guests of local residence who came to tea and stayed to marvel. Here the giant of merchandise, cut off by his drawbridge, served in his baronial hall, assumed the life and surroundings of a medieval noble, tempered by the central heating in winter and the refrigerating air shafts in summer of a coeval millionaire; and here with him always his shadow, always the shadow's shadow, Lardy Quinnet. Sim went sometimes up to the Towers; shadow, when Mr. Stupendity, relaxing on these occasions, sometimes would shed her, and shadow's shadow, whom by no means ever could shadow shed, invariably made visits to Old Ballards.

Then B. C. D., that super-famous novelist, fled coyly sometimes through the lanes that Sim would ride. The illustrious author had appeared first from a caravan impenetrably hidden in the depths of a wood but mysteriously had disappeared after making it his home for a fortnight and, presenting himself at Old Ballards a week later, explained the reason. "You would have thought no one could have found it where I had had it lugged to," he said, "but someone did and out came a photograph of it in all the papers with an 'inset' as they call it of me, and the heading 'Where his caravan hath rested.' Rested! It was hermetically stuck as a matter of fact. People came swarming out from Barton directly the photograph appeared — dash it, they even made it one of the attractions for the motor charabanc rides — and as I couldn't get the dashed thing to move I had to leave it there and fly. My life is awful, you know." He was over beyond Shifney now, he had come to tell Sim, in a room he had taken there, and frequently thereafter Sim met him.

And finally, here also, very often, was Elisabeth; chartered by Miss Marr, accommodated at the Towers, at one period for many weekends in succession, at another

for the whole of a fortnight; she was cataloguing the Stupendity (Chesney Towers) library.

These in his habitation were the movements and the influences set about Sim, each in its degree to touch him on his way as, without realising it, we all are touched to our issues not by motions of our designing but by straws come upon the wind. Over in Blackheath, where lay Old Gand, prisoner still within the dungeon of his body, holding still his numbing hand upon his watchers, upon Swiss Jule, on Conrad Bryne, on Alice, most heavily of all on Charles, also were movements.

It is the incidence on Sim of all of these that is to be examined; and there comes appositely "What is incidence, *exactly*?" pronounced in the baronial hall of Chesney Towers by one, Miss Eager, who was of a local company invited by Mr. Stupendity to tea.

Miss Eager, who lived at Barton End, was of the type of maiden lady, frequent in boarding houses and in country villages, who appear to have sprung, fully dressed, from the womb of time at the age of about forty-five; who by no possibility can be imagined ever to have been any younger; and who, mysteriously, never appear to become any older. The passage of a decade at the end of which they are re-encountered finds them precisely as at the beginning of the decade they had left; and they wear clothes which, though always the same clothes, appear mysteriously to merge into each new fashion as each new fashion arises. They never alter. Time does not wither nor custom stale their infinite virility.

Miss Eager was very prominent in all local activities; she cruised busily upon the high C's of such — Chatter, Charities and Culture — and she brought to their committees and assemblies the enviable and invaluable quality of eliciting information without betraying ignorance. This Miss Eager did by her employment at the end of

her very question of the word "*exactly.*" "What is so-and-so *exactly*?" She stressed exactly with a stress that no word in the language not buttressed, as 'exactly' is buttressed, by some of the stoutest pillars of the alphabetical bridge across the abyss of inarticulation, could possibly support without crumpling out of audition; and the stress she thus gave it had the happy quality of implying that, while she of course knew everything on the subject that was commonly known, hers was the type of erudition that desired to know also every secret, possibly sinister, depth that was not generally known. So masterly indeed was Miss Eager's use of this key to knowledge that, in actual fact knowing nothing whatsoever about anything, she could unlock with it portals to which even the red man, dancing in the setting sun, may, in those days, an aerial on his wigwam, be supposed to have entry.

"What is Mr. Lloyd-George *exactly?*" Miss Eager could (and had) asked. "What is Bolshevism *exactly?*" "What are the Georgians *exactly*?" "What is ——"; from stiffish such as "What is the Protocol *exactly*?" through matters of conjecture such as "What is self-determination *exactly*?" and matters of opinion such as "What is the dole *exactly*?" down to the elements of latterday knowledge such as "What is a close-up *exactly?*" there was nothing which Miss Eager, gaining rather than losing respect, could not by this means have explained to her; and the inner beauty of her method lay, such is general knowledge when pinned down, in the fact that invariably it was the elements (which was what she sought) and not the profundities (which she would not have understood) with which her informants, pinned, provided her.

Not, however, in the case of that young woman who knew everything, Miss Marr.

Within the circle of local residents sipping tea in the baronial hall Doctor Peek, a masterly and argumentative gentleman, had been saying a few incisive words about the government and about the ideas on taxation of the government. "Whereas," Doctor Peek fiercely concluded, standing upright, cup in hand, before the assembly, "Whereas the first principle of taxation is not the profit of taxation but the"—he dropped from his saucer a toasted bun, with astounding dexterity swooped at and with a very loud smack caught it as it fell—"*incidence* of the taxation."

He put the bun in his pocket and a pencil with which he had been hectoring his audience on his saucer and glared aggressively upon the assembly.

"What is incidence," inquired Miss Eager, "*exactly*?"

Doctor Peek who had discovered his error in the matter of pencil and bun and appeared to be upset about it, was engaged in angrily adjusting them. Miss Eager's eye, baffled in that quarter, and finding, as with her questions she so often found, all other eyes avoiding it, caught that of Mr. Stupendity. Mr. Stupendity immediately turned his eye upon the eye of his shadow, seated slightly behind his left elbow; and Miss Marr, who at that moment had bitten largely into a muffin, disposed, as by a conjuring trick, both of the portion in her hand and the portion in her mouth, and without the slightest discomposure immediately spoke.

"Incidence," said Miss Marr, "is the act of falling upon; bearing or onus; the direction in which a body, or a ray of light or heat, falls on a surface or other body."

"Gosh!" murmured Lardy Quinnet, standing beside Miss Marr, awed.

"Thank you," murmured Miss Eager, wiping her lips, staggered; and as if faint she arose at once and moved unobtrusively away, courteously attended, however, to the

door by Lardy, to whom "What," said Miss Eager, glancing nervously behind her, "is Miss Marr *exactly?*"

Lardy never in his life before had spoken to Miss Eager but he was not thereby reserved. "She is my very dear fiancée," he said. "A thoroughly good, truthful girl — and we all know that virtue is its own best policy or whatever the thing is — whose betrothal to me was a matter of very deep satisfaction to my dear parents."

"Thank you," murmured Miss Eager, and tottered through the doorway, nervously fumbling it for support.

Lardy turned brightly from her exit with the idea of attaching himself now to Sim, whom, as he walked with Miss Eager, suddenly he had observed. He had news for Sim. On the occasion, a month before, of a Stupendity visit to the Towers, Sim rather diffidently had shown Lardy and Miss Marr, calling on him, sketches of that furniture designing, "expressive of something," to which he had been turning his attention and had shown them also, in the form of a light arm-chair, an "occasional" chair in the trade term, the first actual product of his idea, and in the form of a light octagonal table, again an "occasional" table, the second, this still in process of construction. The chair had been made in the village by an unemployed disabled soldier, formerly a cabinet maker; the table was being done by Old Yeoman. Increasingly interested as he proceeded on his notion, Sim had advanced from rough idle sketches to studied designs, painstakingly drawn, presented, with the aid of a small box of paints, in colour. The work had fascinated him.

It fascinated his callers.

"Why, Major Paris, these are exquisite!" cried Miss Marr, bending over the designs.

"Sim, old man," declared Lardy, "you've rushed in where idiots fail to tread or whatever the thing is. This

is something new, you know. My hat and brain it is! Any more of 'em?"

Sim was as pleased as surprised. "I haven't," he said. "But there is the chair done by the man I was telling you about; that one."

He pointed across the room, and with the "that one" touched a finger on his sheet of designs. Miss Marr and Lardy looked from chair to design and from design to chair again; then went towards the chair.

They were silent for a moment; quite visibly they were impressed.

"Sim," said Lardy, gazing, "it breaks over me like dawn breaking over that place the people old B. C. D. calls the Bodyguard gas about, that the chap who made this was a bit of a genius."

Miss Marr turned to look as it were with new eyes at Sim. "I would say," she answered slowly, "that it is Major Paris who is the genius."

"What you say today Lancashire says tomorrow, *and* old Stupe," said Lardy. "What is the wood, Sim?"

"Birch," Sim told him.

Lardy looked at Miss Marr. "This eye that I am rolling at you is the Stupe or Inquiring eye."

"I should have thought," said Miss Marr coldly, "that even you knew that the birch was a smooth-barked, slender-branched northern forest tree of the genus *Betula.* Didn't they use the twigs of it on you at Eton?"

"Never on me," said Lardy piously.

"A very great deal is thereby accounted for," said Miss Marr.

"Mine," explained Lardy, "was one of those sunny natures led always by a smile, never by a harsh word or a blow. Sunnypate, the Head used to call me."

"Addlepate," corrected Miss Marr.

"No, Sunnypate. I was the pet of the school;" and

finding then that Miss Marr was paying not the smallest attention to him but was absorbed solely in the designs, "But, I say, Sim," he broke off, "this stuff of yours hits me hard in my capacity as Brain. I have an idea. I'm going to collar those designs and the chair. I am going to show old Stupe that——"

"Oh, come and have some tea," said Sim.

Lardy, however, abetted by Miss Marr, had collared designs and chair and a fortnight later the table. He had very greatly interested Mr. Stupendity in them and he had very greatly interested in them Mr. Bevis the head of the Stupendity furniture department. "This is a discovery, sir," he had said, speaking with that earnestness which, when he displayed it, caused even Miss Marr to suspect that he was indeed a Brain; and Mr. Stupendity and Mr. Bevis had agreed with him that a discovery indeed it was.

"If we are going to run this furniture, sir," said Mr. Bevis, a man who from long association with furniture appeared to have a french-polished face, "and of course we are, the first thing for it is——"

"A distinctive name," said Mr. Stupendity, part of whose wonder in the eyes of all departments was the unerring swiftness with which he took unspoken words out of their mouths. "Have you a name for it, Quinnet?"

Lardy put his hand to the back of his head as if possibly a name might be there, "Not slick off, sir."

"Bevis?"

Mr. Bevis put a finger down the french-polish of his cheek and looked at it as if possibly the name might there be reflected. "Not at the moment, sir."

"Come, come," said Mr. Stupendity sharply. "Surely it is known by now that when a scheme is brought to me I expect it to be a dressed scheme and that the first essential in a scheme of this description is a name."

"'Stupendity Furniture'," exclaimed Mr. Bevis who

now had drawn finger and thumb down the french polish of his face and, with a start, appeared to find this written between them.

"Stuff and nonsense furniture," said Mr. Stupendity. "There are immense possibilities in these designs. This is something new and furniture design has had nothing new, and has cried out for something new, ever since we fell back on copying the old. 'Stupendity Furniture' would be to localise this furniture, to shop it. The idea of a distinctive, appealing, *national* furniture is here. The name must be a distinctive, appealing name. Miss Marr ——"

"Simparis furniture," said Miss Marr. "Sim and Paris, Simparis."

"Gosh!" said Lardy, stunned.

"The name is found," said Mr. Stupendity, not stunned. He was so accustomed to have spring from his shadow anything he desired immediately he desired it that he took it always as if it had sprung from himself and he never on any occasion expressed acknowledgment of it. "The name is Simparis Furniture. Get busy on that, Bevis, Quinnet. Miss Marr, arrange for me to see this Major Sim Paris when we next go to Chesney Towers."

These were the developments to acquaint him with which Lardy Quinnet turned now from Miss Eager to Sim, not met since the designs and the "exhibits" had been "collared"; but Sim, as Lardy looked for him, was seen by him to be leaving by a further door; and Lardy, for a reason, decided that he would go over and talk with him on the morrow, not follow him now. He had come to know Sim very intimately by this proximity of the Towers and Old Ballard's; and he had noted in him, and had come to adjust himself to, periods of abstraction in his friend when company clearly was not desired. Pro-

found abstraction of that sort was on Sim's face now as he was leaving. "There's something up with that chap," was Lardy's thought, watching him.

It was the echo of a comment made by Charles many months before; it now was deeper justified.

Sim had ridden over. Elisabeth, on her cataloguing occupation, was not due that week; but there always was the chance, Mr. Stupendity being Mr. Stupendity, that she might have been snapped into the Stupendity entourage at the last moment and it was to take that chance that Sim had come. It failed him. A word with a servant in the entrance informed him of the fact; and it was just to make sure that he had glanced in on the party dispersed about the dais in the baronial hall. He came in, unobserved, at the moment of Miss Marr's definition of incidence; stood a moment, having heard it, and withdrew immediately observed only by Lardy and, of the look of profound abstraction on his face, suffered by Lardy to depart unaccosted.

His horse — he had said he might not be long — was being walked by a groom in the courtyard. Sim, deeply attached to horses, his first thought upon seeing the stable at Old Ballard's that it only wanted an occupant, had been able to fill this want on absurd terms through the agency of B. C. D., acquiring thereby a showy sixteen-hand chestnut. The showiness of this chestnut being entirely to the eye and by no chance ever in performance, it had passed in its longish life beneath the legs of a great number of owners before coming, as it came, beneath those of the illustrious novelist. It had been given a great variety of names by these owners, many of them, owing to its peculiarities, harsh and unthinking; by Sim it had been given that of Ethelred because, like that unhappy king, it was never ready. Moving always with the cocked ears and uneasy eye of a deeply suspicious nature sharply

on the look-out for trouble, it never was ready for anything that did trouble it, and always would signalise the fact by an agility of levitation which, had it brought it to fences (at which on the contrary its feet became rooted in the earth) would have made it a hunter of uncommon degree.

"I thought I would go in for riding," B. C. D., touching the subject of a horse for the Old Ballard's stable, had told Sim, "and I began in a quiet way down in Somerset and loved it; but like everything else I dare do it was ruined for me by this extraordinary position my books have got me into. Someone passed the word that I was riding, and where I was riding, and that I was thinking of buying a horse, and of course it got into the papers and I had the usual avalanche of letters let loose on me. I should say a couple of hundred people had a horse that would 'just suit me' and about two thirds of them were facing ruin at the same time and, unless I either bought their brute or would give them a little help, inevitably would meet it. It really is a most extraordinary thing to me, Sim, what a number of people there are who always find some reason to get into touch with me just as they are on the point of disaster. That dashed horse cost me well over a hundred pounds in charity even before I had ever started to buy him. My life's awful, you know."

Sim laughed. "Well, and then you chose this one you are telling me about?"

"Yes, I chose him in a way. Twelve of these dashed people, if you will believe me, boxed their horses down to me 'for any trial I liked' the very day the paragraph appeared in the papers. Man alive, the quiet little place I was trying to find peace in positively swarmed with horses. It was like living in a Rodeo. I had to give out I was ill and go to bed. Well, I chose this one because he was like a lamb when his owner was on him and like

an old sheep when his owner was watching me on him. Soon as I had bought him he changed his sex and turned into a mare, a nightmare. I rode him about a week till every day I was raw all one side of where I sit and stone cold the other through him going along in a kind of right-handed curve snorting at things; and then I got fed up with it and took a bit of a stick out with me and when he started his tricks I gave him one — just one — just to show him which of us was master."

"And which was?" asked Sim perfunctorily.

"He was," said the illustrious novelist gravely. "Sixteen hands is an absurd distance to measure, Sim; but it's an extraordinarily long way to loop the loop even if you make the passage by express as I did. By the time I was able to get up he was in the next county but one somewhere and I came home by train. It was the best part of the ride."

"Where is he now?" inquired Sim when he had vented the amusement caused in him not more by these adventures than by the deeply serious air with which the world-famous novelist narrated them.

"He is eating his head off down where they found him," said B. C. D. "I can't sell him. That is another amazing thing about the position I have got into, you know. I can't sell anything. Everybody seems to think that a man as rich as I am reputed to be ought to be ashamed to sell and ought to give. If I had a Rembrandt I bet you I couldn't get sixpence for it. My life is awful, you know."

Sim was too keen and good a horseman and too low in pocket not to spring at the chance that offered here. The upshot of these disclosures was that the horse was removed from the eating off of his head in Somerset to the tethering of his head in the stable at Old Ballard's and Sim rarely was able to look at him without a smile at

Ethelred the Unready's name and his worthiness of it and at the memory of B. C. D.'s distresses in his company.

But not today. This day, heavy in the abstraction that Lardy had read upon his face, he mounted, not with his usual careless ease, but slowly, as though his thoughts, ponderous, also had mass and weighed upon him; and he rode out and rode away with mien of one much occupied, at pace and in direction left to his horse's choosing.

CHAPTER II

THE LIGHT

It was so light and chance a thing as Miss Marr's precise definition of "incidence" that, like a cloak dropped suddenly on his shoulders, had cast this mood about him. Nothing, when trying to think dispassionately of his state, was so curious to him as the fortuitousness with which in these days trains of thought were set off in him; with which, and with what strange effects, events arose and touched him; and from dispassionate reflection upon it he would fall into wonder — were they but random, these odd trains of thought, or were they thrown up by some deeper tendency always working now within him? — and on this conjecture would find himself involved in an abstraction profound, recondite, such as had him now.

Incidence — "the bearing of one thing upon another." The thought that had him was the reflection, impressive, pregnant of meaning, that, "when you come to think of it," everything throughout the whole of life, from its lowliest form to its highest activity, had bearing on, was in direct relation with some other thing. The blade of grass that fed a grub or died and fed the soil; the wave that fell and falling drew the wave behind it; up through creation to man, its summit, each speck, each jot, each tiniest thing, had office, had purpose, moved in its sphere and handed on its being. He took deep breath as though involuntarily he would maintain himself against the onset, whelming as a tide, of the inference he drew. His thought was, "Not a child, realising that, could fail to realise that there must something be behind all this; some

Direction, supernal; some Intention, beneficent; something, there *must* be, behind it all."

His horse had stopped. He saw himself to be at the foot of a long rise of common-land that led to Barton End. He raised his eyes. Their direction was westward; the sun was setting. Clear and flushed rose and gold above, the sky below was deeply black. Upon the blackness, midway to the horizon, drifted a long thin trail of cloud of grey; the sun, just gone beneath the black, gave the long trail a faintest gleam.

"Something behind it all."

There rose upon the thought, as spectral figures merging on a mist, words spoken to him which, ever since their speaking, had stood within the circle of his daily mind as fingerposts, bleak, sentinel, conspicuous from all quarters, stand on a moor. Always his daily thoughts were turning to these posts. One was Elisabeth's "Of God", that sudden and astonishing conception come out of her like a cry upon that night of their reunion; another an astounding (astounding in the simplicity and the unexpectedness of its utterance) thing dropped from Old Yeoman when, setting him to work upon that table, he had essayed to explain to him the theory of his designs in furniture. "Trying to express myself, to express an idea," he had said to that blind old man, "in wood, Yeoman. Artists express themselves in colours, in words, in stone; well, I don't see why a man can't express himself in wood." Old Yeoman's reply: "In wood? It hath been done, sir; ay, mightiest expression of a man ever the world knew hath been in wood." "What, Yeoman?" he had asked. And the astounding answer: "Sir, the Cross of Christ."

Finger-posts! Both, try as he would to lose them, ("There is nothing between me and God," his constant iteration) upstood ever before him, pointing for him as

points a finger-post whose word the nightbound traveller hates to obey yet may not disbelieve. Those were two; and joining them, chiefest, most potent and disturbing of them, stood also that most strange emergence of his name in that text that Old Yeoman with his paper-knife and with his Braille Gospel had found for him. "Message" that old man had called it. Message! Urgently, since first these his perplexities had come upon him, he had desired some message, some hope, some help, some light, some guide, that might deliver him out of them. Message! "Him they compelled, *compelled,* to bear His cross." This was not message. "God is after me," he had written to Elisabeth. "*Compelled* to bear His cross." This was not message; this was doom.

His horse, slowly walking, had brought him to the brow of a long rise. He stopped it. He was desperately troubled in his mind. He drew rein and the eyes that now he raised were heavy with his great unhappiness. The sky had changed. The colours that the sun had left above, deserted of the sun, fading were almost gone. It was within the clouds which in a dark wall stood upon the margin of the earth that light was coming now. While he looked, the grey trail that ran along them and that had faintly gleamed, now, by the sun's descent, was seen as fissure, riving an upper and a lower bank. While he looked the fissure, the sun descending to it, was filled with a great light.

Memory stirred.

Where was it and on whom that suddenly a light shone . . . a light shined . . . a light shined from the sky . . . *what* were these stirring, buried words? . . . Ah! . . . that "suddenly a light shined round about from heaven."

Memory, encouraged, sprang.

It was Saul.

Fragmentarily, not to the verse, but certainly, in half-caught phrases, it all returned to him. "Saul, Saul, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks; and Saul said Lord, what wilt thou have me do?"

Sim got off his horse. He was shaking with a very great trembling. He put his arms on the saddle before him and leant his weight against it. Men do not utter to themselves their thoughts aloud; but beneath the great trembling that had him his jaws, as of a man shivering, were shaking, and in shaking words his thoughts came out. "That was Paul," he said, "in conversion. Conversion does not come like that. It comes of something actual. Nothing is here."

A little afterwards he said: "I do not want conversion. It is nothing to me. I do not want it. It is nothing."

And after a little again: "It comes of desire of it; I have not desired it. It comes of a something definite, something actual; nothing is here."

He raised his eye across the saddle-bow and now was something. Where in the fissure of the clouds had been a bright light in a single place, now was a path of light. It ran from the extreme brightness of the sun southwards and downwards; and by the formation of the riven bank it presented the aspect of a road of light, broad and gently rising to where the strong light burned, running along a dark and enormous cliff, bounded by a cliff as dark, as huge, towering above it. He began to say —

"Mother, I am your Sim, and I am frightfully unhappy. I am talking to you now, looking at that road, because I have the vision that it is down a road like that, gloriously beaming, that you will come one day to meet me. Mother, I would to God it might be now, here, at this moment, because I am frightfully unhappy, Mother. You have told me — one of your beloved messages to me — that you want me to be happy. Mother, in these last

months I have tried to be; I cannot be. I only want to come to you as I used to come home to you, and you waiting for me. Beloved, I can see you, see you in your every line, treading down that path to take me up. 'Sim!' I can hear your voice; and I shall answer 'Mother!'; and I shall take again those soft, dear hands of yours, touch that dear face, look into those dear and loving eyes, kiss those beloved lips. Oh, Mother. . . ."

He said to her after a little while:

"Your face? Your voice? Your hands, eyes, lips? It may not be so; earthbound, I have no other terms in which to think of you; earthbound, I cannot know the form that you will have. Mother, I only know that when I cross and see that path and you upon it coming to me, I only know that you, whom I remember worn, sick with much suffering, bowed with many griefs, desirous of my hand at every feeble step to help you, then will be exquisite in strength, sublime in knowledge; I only know that I who, when we were together, was prop and guidance, then will be faint with great dismay; only that then it will be I shall be the weak and helpless, much afraid, you the strong, the guide, to ——"

He bit upon his lower lip and kept it bitten.

He released at last his lip and said:

"The guide to God."

He had come over him a sense of a very great comfort. He had refused himself emission of that last word, and while he refused it the eyes with which upon that road he had envisaged his mother coming to him had envisaged himself flung there in pose not possible to living limbs as is a body found at daybreak flung and abandoned by the tide upon the shore. He had emitted that word he had refused and the eyes of his vision had seen her stoop to touch him . . .

It was gone. His mind gave up the images it had conceived. It presented him only with that sense of a great quiet which instantly with his emission of that word had come to him. He seemed to have no thoughts; peace only; all his mind a void and all the scene he turned and looked about void also, held in some utter stillness as though, cognisant of where he was about to go, arresting all that might distract his purpose, waiting his movement, Nature held her breath.

He put his arm through his horse's bridle and with no thoughts, with no declared intention, went down the track that brought him to the road where stood the church of Barton End. He never yet, often wishing to, had entered it; he had withstood delivery of himself to influences that there might come upon him.

He tethered his horse without the gate, went up the path and entered. He was alone in the church and he seated himself, then knelt.

He had no voice for this. First for a long time he knelt in consciousness alone of that great stillness that had filled him. His thoughts, no voice, then said:

"If I am shown herein my purpose and know the purpose thine. . . . If, as with Saul, I have had summons, not by desire, not by prayer, not by constraint of sorrow, but, unsought, of thee. . . . If, as with Simon, it is mine to bear thy cross. . . . If these, O God, suffer me some truth that I can understand."

No more; and remained thus.

PART THREE

IN CHARITY

CHAPTER I

THE DEBT

ELISABETH'S life, self-chosen, was very hard. She worked unceasingly; but work unceasing is not of itself hard. The always busy are the enviable. They have no time for frets or ills; their brief snatched leisures, just in being leisures, are packed with delights impossible of purchase by those at whose command lies all the treasury of all of pleasure's toyshops. Not less than sleep, work does knit up the ravelled sleave of care. It is a hard couch; but — herein its recompense — a stone pillow, before and since that used at Bethel, is capable of dreams.

Elisabeth had no dreams.

"Twenty years!" Sim had exclaimed aghast when he had estimated how long it would take her to discharge her debt; and, vowed to this duty that she had set herself, the long decades that it must take stood like a tunnel at whose end light, dreams, if they were there, must when she reached the mouth have faded, vanished. This had been sorry mood in which to face her task had her task been, as duty often can be made, an office to be followed only in the letter of its law; only the mind need then be given it, the heart can be elsewhere; and the heart, however long the road, always can dream dreams. Elisabeth had no dreams. Her heart, and not her mind alone, was given to her duty. In her father's memory she pursued the spirit, not the letter only, of her self-established law. It was not sufficient to her to throw sop to the one her father had injured as salve might be impatiently jerked through the patient's window of a work-house dispensary;

her duty to her father's name lay, as she saw it, not in the mechanical action of paying off his debt; it lay in striving by every means in her power to hush a voice — Miss Andiron's — that daily cried out bitterly against him; to soothe a spirit — Miss Andiron's — that hourly morosely brooded on the hurt that he had done her.

"I do not want only to pay the debt," she more than once had said to Sim. "Discharge of that is of itself no better satisfaction than paying a tradesman's bill. Sim, what I cannot bear is the thought of one sending out bitter hate against my poor father; dear Sim, that is what I want to shield my father from."

Miss Andiron, embittered, made this very, very hard to do.

Urgent to do it, Elisabeth not alone by sedulous devotion to her earning gave her life, for her father's life, to Miss Andiron's life; she kept closely in touch with Miss Andiron, and by all means in her power, by the offer of her services in every moment not required by her work, by infinite patience, by effort of every possible means of kindness, she strove to make amends for what had been done, to cause the father, through the daughter, to be less harshly judged, to cause the path that the father had made hard by the daughter to be made smooth.

Miss Andiron, embittered, refused to have her path made smooth.

She lived in a London boarding-house and whenever Elisabeth came to see her, as at every opportunity Elisabeth came, "This is how I am compelled to live" was the burthen of her cry. "I might have had a nice house, I might have had nice servants, I might have kept my car; but no, I was robbed. In my old age when I need comforts and when I could have had comforts I am denied comforts because your father robbed me."

These were cruel words for the heart of Elisabeth.

"I might have had ——" "I might have been ——" There was scarcely a sentence spoken by Miss Andiron to Elisabeth that had not these lacerating beginnings. Whatever subject the girl, striving to brighten and entertain this jaundiced life, would open, those were invariably the handles to which it would be twisted.

"*Such* a fog today, Miss Andiron," she would come brightly in. "It is simply black. I scarcely could ——"

"Yes, and do you ever think of me, I wonder, forced to stay here and endure it? I might have been in the South of France, I might have been in Italy, I might have been on one of those lovely cruises in the Mediterranean I have just been reading about. But no; I was robbed; your father robbed me and I must suffer for it."

"I have brought you something, Miss Andiron," Elisabeth would come in. "I believe you will love it. The window of a shop in Piccadilly was full of the most glorious black grapes, as big as walnuts, I declare. I just *had* to get you some. The price they charge in those Piccadilly shops!" (It was the price of her hat and the next night's dinner.) "But I felt I *had* to. I got half-a-pound. I knew it would be a treat. Look!"

"Yes, it *is* a treat. It was thoughtful of you and of course I thank you. But when I see things like these in the shops, when I am told that they would be a treat for me, is it to be wondered that I feel I might have had all these things just as I wanted them and think them no more a treat than I think a piece of bread a treat? You can put them there; I am not in the mood to eat them now. Anything I might have had; everything I might have had; but no, if ever I get them, they are treats because I was robbed; because your father stole what was mine for his treats."

The quarter day. "Look, Miss Andiron; now you *will* be excited about this; I have never told you; I have kept

it for a great surprise. I really have done splendidly this quarter. I told you of that work I got down in Westershire cataloguing Mr. Stupendity's library. Well, the result! Now see; instead of the usual £50 I have brought you — you will never guess; try to guess."

Indifferently: "I couldn't guess."

Beamingly: "Sixty-five pounds! There! Five tens, two fives, and ten ten-shilling notes because I know you like to have some ten-shillings. And look, everyone absolutely fresh and unused. I asked particularly that they should be and they were awfully nice to me at the Bank. There — sixty-five!"

Miss Andiron takes the notes, whose number has drawn upon the number of their earner's hours of rest, whose worth has debited the worth of her vitality, whose freshness has paled the freshness of her cheeks. "I say thank you," says Miss Andiron, "because I am polite. I do not, I cannot, and you cannot expect me to say thank you because I am grateful. Nobody can be expected to be grateful for the bare return in part, in very small part, of what is their own. When once a quarter you bring me money like this what can you suppose my feelings are? I might have had money like this abundantly and certainly. I get it now in driblets and with no possibility of counting on it. This quarter you say you have been lucky. Next quarter you may be unlucky, you may be ill, you might die. What would happen to me then? No, I might have been free from every anxiety, I might have lived surrounded by comforts, I might have had all I could want; but, no, hand to mouth is how I must live because I was robbed; because your father robbed me."

This caused much suffering to the heart of Elisabeth.

In the week-end following Sim's experience as he rode home from Chesney Towers Elisabeth came down to the Towers immediately after a visit to Miss Andiron in

which Miss Andiron, particularly out of humour, had caused her particular suffering and after three weeks since last Sim had seen her which visibly had been devoted to unresting labour that Miss Andiron might be kept supplied. She had come alone, no Stupendity party with her; and Sim went over to the Towers and into the library and was struck, immediately he saw her, by the paleness of her face, and by the sigh with which, getting up from the table at which she worked, she sank onto the couch to which he led her, and by her silence following her sigh.

These were the signs and tokens of a very great weariness. They caused in Sim an access of pity and a great hungering of love. They caused in him also a very great concern at that which, much wounded in a great conflict within himself, he had come to tell her.

CHAPTER II

THE CONFLICT

Approaching it circuitously, he began:

"Elisabeth, you are frightfully tired."

"Oh, I am a little bit fagged, Sim."

"You have been overdoing it?"

She made a gesture with her hands. "There is a lot to do."

"You have been going too far, Elisabeth."

She sighed. "Sim, I have a long way to go."

He said, "That is what I want to talk to you about. A long way to go; there are twenty years for you to go, at this rate."

"Nearly twenty years, Sim."

"And then?"

She made again her gesture.

The couch was low. She put one foot across the other and clasped her hands about the knee thus raised and set her eyes upon the long vista of the great apartment. As though her thoughts hung pictures there and she reviewed them, she said low and softly: "I feel that I shall be very old in twenty years, Sim; all gone that is pleasant in one; all done that one cares to do."

Perhaps the picture changed.

"We might have married, Sim; had children ——"

A sound of pain escaped him.

"Dear, this thing came into my life; marriage, dear, you, motherhood, children, had to go."

Her voice was only just to be heard of him.

"Of course, that is frightful for a woman, Sim. They talk, these women, the women of what poor, funny B. C. D. calls the Bodyguard, the female of the species, they talk, of course they are just the noisy ones, of this and that and glorious independence. Sim, I have got independence. I am doing very well. When I have paid my father's debt, I can see, it is quite plain to me, that I shall be established, able to hire out my connection, beyond any fear of penury or starved old age. That is independence, Sim; and it is to be had in circumstances infinitely better by all the women infinitely cleverer than I. That is independence, Sim; but, Sim, for a woman that is life incomplete, not rounded off, left just to peter out."

She watched those pictures.

She presently said, "Sim, a man, somehow, can complete his life, round off, satisfy it, without a woman. I don't know how; I only know that it is clear he can. Alone, he can go up the wave of life, achieve the crest, look down the trough, see the long dimness in the hollow, begin descent, and have no loneliness, no sense of incompletion, no feeling that the goal was here, and, lo, that there is no goal, only the long, cold night.

"A woman can't do that, Sim. She needs, she is created for completion; completion in her husband's and her children's home, Sim. Of course the Bodyguard, the female of the species, would scream and cut themselves with knives to hear me say it. Sim, let them ask the women who, however brilliant now, sometimes look down the trough, right down to the cold, last ripples, where the silence is, the friends gone, the door set ajar and none to enter it, the fire lit and none to share it."

After a while she said: "They need not ask the ordinary ones, like me."

And after a while again: "That is what I am facing, Sim."

His turn was now; with meaning for him much more grim — born in the issues of the conflict he had suffered as he came to see her — his time was now; now was the hour of the casting of his die.

He said: "You need not face it, Elisabeth."

His voice shook. "I love you, beloved."

He said, "I love you, beloved. I have offered you marriage. There were those chances of employment that I had. They did not seem to suit me. That was nothing. If you had said that you would marry me I would have taken one; and can; they still are open."

She murmured, "Dear, my vow."

He nerved himself. "Elisabeth, the thing was that you must earn this money; that you would not take mine. Well, let that be so."

He got up and crossed the room and then returned to her.

"Well, let that be so. But I have thought about this. I have thought that there are circumstances that can alter cases. Those offers that I had happened to be indifferent offers; they would have entailed, if I had taken one and we had married, you still continuing to work if your payments still were to be the same; and they would have entailed living out of London where your connection is so that you could not have worked. Suppose a different case, Elisabeth. Suppose that I had an offer of enough money not only to make your payments to Miss Andiron but to make them much greater, to pay her off in half, in a quarter, of twenty years. Suppose that, Elisabeth; look at it from her, from Miss Andiron's, side. Suppose you asked her to choose — should you continue to pay her as you are paying her or should you, by marrying me, pay her her all in half, in less than half the time? Suppose you asked her that — which would she choose, do you suppose?"

Elisabeth said, " Sim, of course there is no doubt which she would choose."

" And she is to be considered? Her choice, her wishes are to be considered? "

" Much more than anyone's, Sim."

" Well, then; well, then! " His voice was thick; he seemed to have a great difficulty, as though his throat were constrained, in ordering his words; there was about his look and tone an intensity that almost was alarming to her. He said a third time, " Well, then! Suppose I had an offer tomorrow, now, this minute, of a thousand pounds a year; a thousand, and more increasingly to come. If I had such an offer there would be the position we have been supposing, wouldn't it? "

She assented.

The harsh obstructiveness suddenly went out of his voice. He said deeply: " And, Elisabeth, there is this; this that you have told me of the incompletion of your life; this of its desolate and pitiable outlook; this of our love, of me, of children to us."

" Sim, yes," she breathed.

He said, " All possible within the offer of a thousand pounds a year."

She breathed: " All possible "; she sighed, " impossible all."

He said strongly, " Not impossible! Elisabeth, I have had that offer."

" Sim! "

He had his elbow, as he sat, on his knee. He bent forward his clenched fist and she could see the flesh gone white where with a terrible constriction of his fingers the nails pressed in. " I have had that offer," he said. He bowed his head down onto his extended arm, " God help me, I have refused it."

She saw that something very insupportable had hap-

pened. She put an arm about his bowed shoulders. "Oh, what is this, Sim?"

As if insupportably there pressed some crushing weight upon him, he moved his clenched fist slowly up and down, drawing his forearm to his head and there pressing it, rigidly extending it so that the tendons on his wrists stood up like cords. His voice coming between teeth that were clenched said as in groan, "I have refused it and I have drawn you on to tell me the happiness that I have lost you; I have drawn you on to tell me the happiness that might be mine and I have refused it. God, God!"

"Sim, tell me."

He came up from his bowed position and faced her. "There is a very great deal to tell you. I came today to tell you of two things. That is one. Stupendity came over to see me last Sunday. He has taken up those furniture designs of mine. He thinks that there are immense possibilities in them. He wants to put them on the market —'Simparis' furniture it was to be called."

He stopped. He said wearily, "You had better hear the whole of this part while I am at it, before I come to the other. Simparis furniture; I was to design it; I was to superintend the making of it. Elisabeth, you have to understand, as Stupendity quite clearly understood, that this stuff, this furniture, if it was to create the vogue it could create, essentially must be individually made, by hand and by a craftsman, by a craftsman's hand and under the eye of the designer. No two pieces even of one pattern could be exactly the same, each would have the workman's self-expression. That was the difference between the things of Hepplewhite, Chippendale, Sheraton and those ——"

He broke off. "Dear, I am sorry for all this jargon."

She said, "Dear, go on."

"It is necessary that you should know it all. That was

the difference between the art of those men and the machine-turned stuff, however beautiful, that came after it; that in its turn, was to be the difference between the Simparis stuff and the other. Well, there was the proposal — I was to design, I was to find and select and supervise the workmen. A whole time job, you see. Stupendity offered me a thousand a year — to start with."

He stopped again.

"Dear, wonderful!" she breathed.

He said bitterly, "Yes, wonderful!"

He said to her in tones most deep: "Elisabeth, that was last Sunday, early, just on nine in the morning. That was one thing I had to tell you. The other thing had happened to me on the evening before, just the fewest hours, just a night between; and I had not slept that night; I had not gone to bed; to me it was all in the same period of time. Elisabeth, I had been coming back from here to Old Ballard's; I had been over to see if you might have come down; and as I was coming back a thing happened to me. Elisabeth, my purpose, this that has been so utterly distressing me all these months — Elisabeth, my purpose, as I believe, as, God help me, I know, came to me as I was coming back."

"Sim!"

"Elisabeth, your words, your intuition, it is — of God."

She breathed, "I knew it, Sim."

He told her that which had happened to him. He told her of his thoughts as he rode up the common; of the light in the sky; of his thought of Saul; of his thought of himself, crossed over from life transient to life eternal, flung abject at the foot of that bright road between the two and of his mother coming down to lead him up; of his refusal of his throat to ask her to lead him up to God; of his pronouncing of the word and of the great

stillness that came to him when at last he uttered it; last of his prayer within the church, "some truth that I can understand."

She heard him within her eyes a shining happiness, in her voice murmurs of happy wonder, in her hands touches of a great comfort, that were exquisite to him; and that, exquisite, exquisitely tortured him.

He said, "But, Elisabeth —— But, Elisabeth, when I came down out of that church, as I walked home, all that evening, all through that night in which I could not go to bed but waited the dawn as one might wait a signal, and when it came seemed to have signal from it — all through that, all was clear to me. I had had knowledge unto me of God; I had had revelation, come at last, that my purpose for which I had been kept was purpose of God; all that was clear and with it there was this clear thing, that I had just to wait and I should have that truth that I can understand for which I had entreated. I am nothing without it. I am, this knowledge though I have had, still as all other men — wanting some revelation, seeking some message, waiting some sign. I only am happier than some other men, than the man myself I was before, in this — that the mystery of God, the existence of God, which I indifferently had passed by, almost had denied, now is established in me. I have seen, I *know,* the mystery of God; but I am a very ordinary man, I am a man of my time; a material, practical time, and I wait now to know some truth that I can understand behind the mystery. All I know now, Elisabeth, is that the sign, the message, the truth, the revelation, will come to me. I feel and I know that, the mystery and the knowledge of God within me, I have only now to wait for the revelation; to watch for it; give all my thoughts to it; Elisabeth, to pray for it."

She murmured, "Watch and pray."

His mood seemed to change. He said very heavily, "Yes, watch and pray."

He got up. "I have said that my purpose has been revealed to me; Elisabeth, do you see that it has been only half revealed? Of God, I know; for God, I know; how for God I do not know."

"Sim, it will come when comes the truth that you can understand."

He cried, "You say it will! Elisabeth, I said that, I knew that on the night that it happened; and immediately on the very morning after, immediately in the very moment and flush of my knowledge, came to me this offer which can give me you, give you me. This is the thing to see, Elisabeth, because I know it — that the two are not possible together; God's purpose, man's purpose; all that I think I see of heaven, all that I know I seek of you. God's purpose, that I shall watch and pray for it; man's purpose, that I shall take this offer, earn, work, be occupied. Elisabeth ——?"

She took from him the question he had not spoken. "Sim, you have done what you are to do. God's purpose, you have accepted it; man's purpose, you have refused it."

He cried, "Refused it!" He held out his arm. "It is here, in my hand, waiting for me. I have only to close my fingers to take it. Stupendity will give it me, he would give me twice a thousand pounds, tomorrow, if I will take it. Elisabeth, all our happiness, all mine, all yours, all the longing that I have for you, all the lifting up for you of those dark years to come that you have told me of, all here in my hand —" he began to close his fingers —"for me to close my fingers on."

She leant forward and with one hand beneath his hand with the other hand smoothed back his closing fingers.

CHAPTER III

THE SEARCH

In the time that followed it was very curious to Sim that in a way he could by no means define but only very strongly feel he had the sense of being nearest to answer of his prayer — some truth that he could understand — when he was in the company of a family whose acquaintance he had come to make. These people, resident some ten miles away, were called the Englands.

"Suffer me some truth that I can understand."

He had voiced in that prayer the prayer of his age and of his generation. The generation to which he belonged was in the mass indifferent to religion, in the part standing in two schools of which, both alive to the indifference, one offered in its cure the old, simple and implicit faith; the other compromise, accommodation, between old faith and new understanding. The first demanded of the indifferent faith in things unseen, the second hope despite things seen. The indifferent rejected either; and the age in which the generation stood, stretching from the generations immediately behind to the generations pressing on ahead, presented, as it were, two footholds sundered by a great abyss. Behind was the old order, ahead the new, between the chasm; and the age sought to bridge the gulf. Some, but their numbers, voice and powers were diminishing, would carry forward the bridge from the old works behind; others, but they worked on materials crumbling with each succeeding surge of time, with each new wave of knowledge, worked to send back their new accommodations (as Modernism, the Church and Rational

Belief) or else their new and strange devices (as Spiritism, the Church and Modern Thought) from the further shore.

The indifferent indifferently looked on.

But "Suffer me some truth that I can understand." The age stood too close to the old influences, the indifferent were too permeated in their blood with the old traditions, not to feel, however dimly, however inarticulately, the need of a light handed down to them through generation on generation and now cut off, no longer theirs. Wide and deep as was the indifference, as widely and as deeply felt was the darkness. The measure of the indifference was the measure of the need. There was in men everywhere a hunger for a positive faith that would satisfy. The accommodators, the squarers of old faith with new knowledge, the explorers of the spirit world, the revisers of the Prayer Book, the brighteners of the established forms of worship, these by their very earnestness proclaimed themselves as searchers also for such a faith. The measure of their earnestness was the measure of their need.

The cry was that the Church had lost its hold on the people. The fact was that the people had lost their hold upon the Church.

Simon Paris, seeking with the rest a truth that he could understand, was in this advantage among them that it never occurred to him to look for that truth in any other quarter or by any other devices than the Church itself, its message and its teachings, as revealed to him in that moment when, in place and in relief of his disquietude, had come to him an exquisite stillness, a flooding of comfort. Actuated as he thenceforward was actuated, a mind less guileless, an intelligence better informed, a nature more inherently devout and better practised in devotion, would have sought truth perhaps as hermits have sought

it, by retirement and ceaseless communication with the spirit; perhaps as zealots have sought it, by assumption of knowledge and by fanatic zeal. It all was new, intensely wonderful to Simon Paris, and he sought it only as a child admitted to an enchanted garden would find, without actively seeking, further enchantment — namely by standing amidst and without question accepting the wonder that was there.

"Purpose!" (He went on.) "Is not it odd, Elisabeth, "that in that very moment of the revelation that came to me I immediately should have asked for further revelation. What had I received? Why, I suddenly had, have; my faith suddenly was, is; the *knowledge* of a living God whose presence I felt, feel, as certainly as ever since her death I have had the *knowledge* of the living spirit of my Mother and of her spiritual presence with me. What more could I want? Elisabeth, I have thought of this a lot, and I can tell you what more it is that I feel I want. It is the *mystery* of God alone that at present I am alive to; it is some truth of the mystery to which I still am, so to speak, dead. As one says of conventional mysteries, there is something behind this; and, Elisabeth, somehow I have the feeling that somehow it is coming to me, and that it is coming to me not for myself alone but for some purpose.

"Purpose!" (he went on) "Is not it odd, Elisabeth, how that word Purpose persists with me? Sometimes I think ——. Shall I tell you what I think? You remember I told you in the library at the Towers that day that I knew that my purpose was revealed to me in so far as that I knew now that it was of God but that it still was hidden from me as to how of God? Well, the whole of that prayer I prayed was spontaneous; not in a single word or thought was premeditated. It was put into me somehow; and, Elisabeth, how strange it was: "If I may

see herein my purpose and know that purpose thine . . . If as with Saul . . . summons . . . If as with Simon . . . thy Cross . . .” If those, Elisabeth, *then* ‘Suffer me some truth that I can understand.’

“Elisabeth, does it not seem as though, if that truth is suffered me, the purpose must be for me to tell it? The thought frightens me. The kind of person I am, how could I ——? Nevertheless I do know that I am very far from being the only one who seeks a truth that a man can understand, a positive faith that will satisfy. And nevertheless I do somehow have the feeling that somehow it is coming to me, that somehow, insensibly, I am getting close to it, that somehow ——. Elisabeth, there have been moments, do you know, when amazingly I have felt that the truth was there, in my presence, and that I could put out my hand and grasp it. Amazing is the word if only because amazingly unlikely have been the circumstances. The other day at those people I have mentioned to you, the Englands ——”

He began to tell her about the Englands.

CHAPTER IV

THE K.O.H. HOUSE

THE Englands lived over at Knapton, beyond Shifney. They were a very old family, many generations settled in that part of the country and owning there a considerable estate; and Sir Henry England was dependent, Andrew told Sim, entirely on the revenues of the property. Sir Henry and Lady England had been calling on Lord Staverton, at Staverton Park, Sim up for the afternoon, when this information had been given; and "property being the drain instead of the source that it is now", Andrew had added, "you can guess what that means."

Sim, at this first meeting, had taken a great fancy to the pair. Sir Henry, a man of about sixty, was of the type, beneath whose picture any generation, Sim, looking at him, had thought, would have written, in want of the name, "Portrait of an English Gentleman"; his wife's picture, Sim had said to himself, would have exactly partnered it: "Portrait of an English Lady." She had a very sweet face and a most taking gentleness. "Serenity" was the word for her and the precisely same order of serenity stood, in a masculine degree, so markedly in Sir Henry's face that Sim, noticing the curious resemblance it gave them, remembered how as a child he had always sought resemblance in husband and wife, thinking them related as were brother and sister. He might well have imagined it in those two he reflected; and regretting, because he had liked them, the hard times on which Andrew seemed to say they had fallen, he took up

the words " You can guess what that means " with which Andrew had hinted it.

" As Miss Eager would say," he asked, " what does it mean *exactly,* Niggs? "

Andrew with the Duke Paris complete indifference to the human side said indifferently, " Means that his address has been Queer Street for a long time."

" Why doesn't he sell? " Sim inquired. " I thought they were all doing it, these landed people; isn't ' England Changing Hands ' one of the writings on the wall today? "

Andrew began to move away. " This particular England isn't allowing any hand-changing," he said, " because he has got a craze that it is his duty to his tenantry to stand by them at whatever cost to himself. Well, I have some mail to attend to. I must leave you."

" It is not a bad craze," said Sim thoughtfully.

" It's a damned silly one," said Andrew, and left.

Two daughters of the family were the next that Sim met; and this also was at Staverton and on the following night, a Saturday, when they and he (the only outside guests) came up to dinner. Weekend dinner parties at Staverton were of two kinds; those given by Lord Staverton, who was a widower, when his very old mother, whose permanent home it was, faced him down the table; and those assembled by his married daughter, the house placed at her disposal, when Lord Staverton was not present because he did not approve of his daughter's friends, and her grandmother was not present because, disapproving both of the lady and her friends, she was in bed.

This was a Lord Staverton party. Lord Staverton was wonderfully tender to his very old mother, and she enormously proud of her famous son, and it was his habit on these occasions curiously to relapse from his Nelson Column leonine aspect into an aspect which, though still massively leonine, was massively benign. One expression

of this was his custom, recalling to his mother and to himself the days when high tea was their evening meal, of keeping his whole party, and not the men only, seated about the table for general conversation when coffee was served; and it was in this pleasantly easy half-hour that Sim noticed an attribute in the two England daughters that struck him as, in his expression to Linda, "uncommonly nice."

The two had presented themselves to his notice as girls in their final 'teens, very alike, notably pretty, and with an engaging air, unusual in their day, of quite frankly enjoying their invitation. They had the air of high pleasure merely in the fact of being alive, a feature wherein they differed sharply from Lord Staverton's married daughter (who, unusually, had suffered herself to be her father's guest on this occasion) and from a friend she had brought with her to support her through the ordeal, both of whom looked as if they would a great deal rather be dead. The daughter, Lady Millicent Fell, prominent in gossip journalism as Lady "Tony" Fell, wife of Captain the Hon. "Tony" Fell, and when she was not, as now, insufferably bored, looking like it, sat opposite Sim; her friend was on his left. This lady who had been introduced to Sim by Lady Tony as "Fly Jennet, the writer, you know", was thin to the point of emaciation, shingled as to her hair, shorn as to her clothes (she was short and what portion of her presented itself above the table appeared to Sim to be entirely naked) ate scarcely anything, spoke not at all, and at the earliest possible moment planted in her mouth a cigarette tube which stretched half across the table draughts from which she inhaled in volumes that caused the cigarette to splutter like a firework and exhaled, through her nose, in such very minute quantities as to give the suggestion that, like the most modern engines, she consumed her own smoke. Sim, at whose other hand was

Linda, had made but one effort at conversation with her. "I am afraid I am the worst possible person to be put beside you," his effort had been. "I read hardly anything. What do you write?"

Miss Fly Jennet who was flicking a bit of fish round and round her plate addressed it and not Sim. "I don't write; I gesture."

"Ah," said Sim, entirely at sea, but guessing instinctively that this must be a member of the Bodyguard, and tried again.

"Do you know B. C. D.'s novels?"

"I thank God," said Miss Fly Jennet to the fish, "I do not."

Sim tried no more. He gave himself to Linda's jolly rattle and to watching the obvious pleasure with which the England girls were enjoying themselves. The "uncommonly nice" incident came when, during the sitting round at coffee relaxation, Lord Staverton, entirely in the old high-tea manner and phrase, spoke down the table.

"Well, mother, I think it would be rather nice if someone were to entertain us, don't you?"

"Why, very, very nice, dear," agreed the very old lady. She beamed down the table. "Now, who will? Miss Jennet, my daughter tells me that you recite quite wonderfully and that ——"

Miss Fly Jennet without removing the tube from her mouth announced, "I don't care to."

The very old lady flushed. Sim was looking at the elder of the England girls and saw her, her eyes moving between the two speakers, flush, quite painfully, also. Lord Staverton's mother caught her eye. "My dear, your mother was telling me — little French ballads I think she said ——"

The girl jumped to her feet. "Of course I will, Mrs. Miller. They are dreadfully silly little things, I'm afraid,

but we know them by heart, my sister and I, and if you would like it ——"

Her sister as spontaneously and unaffectedly jumped up. A piano was in the great room and they went to it and, one playing, the other stood beside her and they gave in delightfully fresh voices a delightful little French song, one of the series of old national jingles, Malbrouck and the rest, familiar to the French as are our own nursery rhymes to us. More were called for, more as prettily and delightfully given. The girls made a quite lovely picture of fresh young grace and charm at the piano; the chance of a painting, Sim thought, for which an artist would have given his ears; but what especially attracted him, what he termed to Linda so "uncommonly nice", was the delightful promptness with which they had responded to the very old lady's call. Of the whole company, some twelve in all, they had previously known, very slightly, Lord Staverton's mother; the ordeal for them was very considerable; yet they had shown no trace either of the affected modesty that desires to be pressed or of the awkward bashfulness that makes urging painful. The impression given was that they had certain entertainment at their command and that it was, as a matter of common courtesy, entirely at the disposal of those whose guests they were. Uncommonly nice, Sim thought; and uncommonly rare Linda agreed; and quite astoundingly rare was the reason the sisters quite simply gave for leaving early when, later in the evening, dancing in progress, they announced that intention.

The very old lady was going to bed, and the two were thanking her for their evening as Sim remembered children used to be taught to thank their hosts after a children's party. "But, my dears," the old lady was saying, "though it is late for me, it is nothing for you. They keep this up hours yet."

" Why, we have scarcely begun," Linda joined.

The younger girl said, " It is ever and ever so kind of you, but we just must go. As it is it will be well after eleven when we get in and it is Saturday, you see."

" Saturday? " questioned Linda.

The elder girl explained, " Why, Father never likes any of us to be frolicking into Sunday, you see."

Miss Fly Jennet, who lolled her cadaverous body against the wall nearby, allowed her cigarette tube to fall from her fingers and laid her head back, mouth open, eyelids drawn, petrified.

Observance of Sunday to that extent was petrifying to wider circles than that represented by Miss Jennet; it further interested Sim in the Englands, and on an early occasion he rode over to call on the family — cards left on him having found him out — and thereafter came to see a great deal of them. The two girls, as he found, were called Rose and May; there was another girl, younger, Violet —" My English nosegay " as Lady England once said of them — and three sons, Henry and John and Willy, whose ages ran from sixteen to somewhere short of thirty and who all happened to be at home, from school from Cambridge and from the Army, during the period of Sim's visits. What it was about this household that so attracted Sim he found it much easier to say than why it was that, extraordinarily, as he had told Elisabeth, he seemed beneath its roof and in the company of its members somehow to be so near that truth he sought, the truth that he could understand, as almost to be able to put out his hand and touch it. Why was it? he asked himself. Why when watching these people, and when in the atmosphere they created about him, came there to him a sense of being in the atmosphere of — what? He could not define it; an atmosphere, in the nearest he could get to expression of it, in which he felt that something *different*

was around him. The Englands all had about them an air of abundant happiness; they all seemed to be quite unusually fond of one another; they practised a courtesy among themselves, and particularly towards their parents, and Sir Henry towards his wife, that reminded Sim of an old-fashioned, but very pleasant, book; the sons had a way of deferring to their father, turning to him in any discussion with a "What do you think, sir?", that was wonderfully engaging to notice; they all maintained in their fun and in their conversation a simplicity and an absence of modern mannerisms equally refreshing; but these, after all, Sim used to think, had no possible relation that he could see to his sense when among these things of being among things of — of what? He could not get it.

A day came when a chance incident, lightly come and lightly gone, threw up to him, he felt sure, a clue.

It was to the neighbourhood of the Englands that B. C. D., abandoning his caravan, had fled and had found a room. The room was in a cottage whose refinements, Sim thought, would have appealed to no one who could have afforded better, but the famous novelist declared his quarters to be "ripping for me"; and he not only, as it appeared, knew the Englands but, astonishingly, appeared to like calling there. "They are about the only family in the world I am not frightened of," he explained to Sim; but his assurance among them did not run, as the event proved, to spending a night with them.

Sim one afternoon had ridden over to B. C. D. and the two had called on the Englands for tea and been pressed, as rain was pouring, to remain for dinner. When they would leave the rain was found to have set in to solid downpour and violent gale. The pair must stay the night, they were told. Sim with a ten mile ride before him was easily persuaded; not force of arms would make B. C. D. stop. The famous author had a long four miles to go

but he also had, as he explained, to get up at his own hour in the morning and make his own cup of tea in his own way, and not forty miles nor fifty hurricanes would prevent him. He became almost tearful, "I never can say No when I am caught like this," he explained, "I never have in my life yet. My life is awful, you know. And if you keep on at me of course I shall give way; but I do most solemnly assure you ——" He turned to Lady England and positively had almost a break in his voice, "Lady England, do be splendid to me and stick up for me. I do most solemnly assure you ——"

And laughing they let him go.

Dinner had shown odd customs in that house. While they sat a little after the meal Sim was dying to smoke but felt he could not be the first. B. C. D., one of whose misfortunes, as he often declared, was that his face showed his every emotion, also apparently was dying of the same longing, for Rose England suddenly exclaimed, "Mother, Mr. Ash is just dead for a smoke; do let's——" and the girls and their mother withdrew; and smokes were at once produced; and Sir Henry said, "It is one of our old family habits, I'm afraid; we never smoke till my wife and the girls have gone, nor ever in the drawing-room, it is just a little way of ours, you know. Everywhere else and all day we smoke, like chimneys."

The close of the evening showed little ways still odder.

All had been sporting together at snooker-pool in the billiard-room. It fell to Sim to put down the last ball, which he did amidst applause, and Sir Henry then looked at the clock, said, "Well, well, that has come just at the right time," and a general move was made to the drawing-room. There was a tap on the door and May England turned to Sim. "We have prayers now," she said.

Three maid-servants came in. They did not sit together but betook themselves among the family and Sir

Henry read a passage from the Bible and conducted some prayers. When it was finished he crossed to and opened the door and bade each servant good-night as she left the room. Before breakfast on the following morning were family prayers again.

This, surprising as it was to him, was not the incident that gave Sim the feeling of a sudden clue to his sensations in the company of these people. It set him thinking in, as it proved, that direction, but no more. He had thought that the custom of family prayer was practised nowhere at his present time, still less in a family of no young children, and less again with participation in it by the kitchen in the degree of one-ness with the drawing-room that he had seen. It was wonderfully pleasant to him; and pondering it in bed that night he very easily came to the conviction that much that was so appealing to him in this house rested on the religious foundation that now he saw it had. At lunch to which he stayed and to which, as had been arranged, B. C. D., greatly daring, had come over on Ethelred, the closer revelation came.

B. C. D. at the meal was led by his soaking on the previous night to tell of a summer end, the wettest and coldest he had ever known, which he had spent entirely alone in a tiny châlet perched high up in the French Alps. He had done everything for himself there, he told, cooking on a spirit stove, his only means of heat, and freezing whenever he was not out tramping. His sole neighbour was a woman who had as he expressed it "the most shocking teeth and the loveliest eyes in Haute Savoie." She had fled from her husband who ill treated her and she lived about a hundred yards from B. C. D. in a tumbled down cabin with a goat and some chickens. He got friendly with her, he explained; she smoked a huge wooden pipe and they used to smoke together and try to understand, he her patois and she his French, "Which is a shade

worse than the Bodyguard declare is my English," said B. C. D. "She got to know that I used to sit, frozen with cold, writing every morning," he went on; "and one particularly vile day in she came to me with a hot brick she had warmed in her stove for me to put my feet on. You know, I thought that was the kindest, the gentlest, action ever I had come across."

There was a general assent.

"Why, it was more than kind," Rose England declared. "It was just exactly what we call ——"

She was nodded at by some of the others. "Yes, yes," they declared, "I was just going to say it."

"Exactly," Rose went on, "what we call K.O.H. kindness."

"And K.O.H.?" Sim asked.

May England joined in. "Why, K.O.H. kindnesses are the sort that spring just out of simple goodness of heart; K.O.H. kindness we always call that; Kingdom of Heaven kindness."

"Don't you think it is rather good?" John England said. "Don't you think it is rather — well, that things like bringing that hot brick just *are* Kingdom of Heaven kindness?"

John was a man not so very much younger than Sim himself, and a soldier; yet he said what he had said, albeit with a slightly laughing air, quite naturally, precisely as though he had been stating a matter of fact thing of everyday normality.

"I think it is just perfect," Sim agreed. "K.O.H. kindness, I shall remember that."

He thought it better than perfect. He was immensely struck by it. He sat silent for some little time; then he began telling of old blind Yeoman, the seats he was making and why.

They all were interested.

"What brought it to my mind," Sim said, "was that K.O.H. of yours. The idea of putting seats for weary travellers at the top of hills, I would call that ——"

They were delighted with him. "You have got it exactly," he was told. "Mother, he must be given the Freedom of the Family, this Major Paris. He gets our passwords to the T. The idea of seats like that; yes, that is just what K.O.H. kindness *is*."

"What K.O.H. kindness *is*." His thought as he rode home to Old Ballard's was: "K.O.H.; Kingdom of Heaven; *that* is the secret of those people; *that* is the secret of all that abounding happiness they have, of their uncommon affection for one another, of their little services to one another. I said last night that that house is what it is because it is founded upon religion. Religion is not the word. The word is ——"

He struck his hand sharply upon his knee. "I have found something! I am near, I believe that I am almost right upon, the truth that I can understand that I have been looking for. 'There is something behind this,' I said to Elisabeth. 'I am alive to the mystery of God,' I said, 'but there is something behind the mystery.' I am beginning to see behind. Religion is the mystery, often cold, often meaningless. Those people have got behind the mystery. It is not religion, an abstract, that is in their house; it is K.O.H., a positive, a living, human thing; divinely human, humanly divine; it is the spirit of the Kingdom of Heaven."

He thought "The truth is there, the truth is there; I am positive of it; the inner thing, the thing behind, the positive faith that will satisfy, it is the faith of K.O.H.; the faith of the spirit of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is there; it is in the K.O.H. spirit that I shall find it."

He was come to Old Ballard's and when he had stabled Ethelred he went to the Yeomans to explain his absence

of the night. Margaret Yeoman, who had heard him, met him at the door, in her hand a telegram. It had come for him an hour before she said and, unaccustomed to telegrams, they had been nervous about it.

He opened it. It was from Charles.

" Old Gand dead. Perhaps you will come this time."

CHAPTER V

THE LETTERS (I)

CHARLES'S hand when he had written the telegram, writing one also in precisely similar terms to Andrew, had trembled so that he could hardly form the words. It had come at last! He had grown to believe that Old Gand never would die. There had been a time when he had been wont to speculate on his death but it had passed long ago; so long ago, and that living death, that dead yet living hand, in the lapse had pressed so heavily upon him, that he had forgotten that he had ever expected it some day to be removed. In Charles's mind that very old man was as stable within the house as was the roof above it. He suddenly was dead and the immediate visible effect upon Charles was precisely as if the roof suddenly had crashed in. He went about shaking; Alice stood by him while he wrote; she had said she would take the telegrams; and she could hear, as if he were frozen with cold, his teeth chattering; and she could see, as if his hands were numbed out of control, his pencil trembling above the beginning of each word and shaking through the letters of each word.

But her own hand that took the telegrams from him also was shaking.

Charles said, stuttering, "I don't see why you should go with the telegrams. I don't want you to go. Why can't a servant go? I don't see why you should leave me."

Her own voice would have stammered if she had not by a tremendous effort controlled it. She said, "I would

like to go. I shall not be ten minutes. I feel that I would like a little fresh air. I would like to be out of the house just for a few moments."

She went. She almost ran down the drive, the telegrams, unfolded, fluttering in her hand. She was terrified of the house. She was not terrified of the dead in the house; she was terrified of the living, Swiss Jule, who sat beside the dead; she was terrified also of Charles who shook before the dead.

She had read the messages as Charles wrote them. The snarl with which the news was sent "Perhaps you will come this time"— the reference, she knew, was to the old sore that Charles had been left alone to deal with his father's death — in other circumstances would have brought remonstrance from her; but while she watched them being written her own circumstances stood about her and she was incapable of remonstrance. It was on a snarl that the news of the death was going to the brothers; it was upon a venomous threat that it had come to her.

She remembered, she felt that in all her life she never could forget, each word that was spoken, each look that was given, each motion that was made.

She had been with Conrad in the drawing-room, on the sofa, in his arms. She had been saying to him, "Well, I am desperately worried about it;" and it was with those words, she was convinced of it, that the horror had begun; she was sure that as she pronounced them she had heard Old Gand's door, she knew its sound, open upstairs; but criminally (but would it have mattered, after all?) she had taken no notice.

"Well, I am desperately worried about it," she had said, "the letters are gone."

"Darling, don't worry. They are just mislaid. They will turn up."

"But, Conrad, *how* can they be mislaid? I kept them, I keep telling you, in that box, all tied together with a piece of ribbon, and the box was locked."

"But it was still locked when you went to it."

"I know it was; that is the mystery."

"You are sure it was?"

"I am positive. There is no question about it. The lock catches somehow and I always have to give the lid a sharp lift before the key will turn. If it had been unlocked it would have opened. But it didn't open; it wouldn't, it was locked."

Conrad Byrne was not taking it very seriously. He was certain, on the facts, that the letters had not been removed. He stroked her face. "Darling, surely that proves it." He smiled down on her. "Let me be a lawyer stating the fact. The box, my lord, is an enormous old-fashioned wooden chest. It is absolutely stuffed with old clothes of the defendant's husband ——"

She smiled. He was soothing her. How have fears when resting in these strong and tender arms? "Conrad, how ridiculous you are!"

"Absolutely stuffed, my lord, the defendant's husband never will get rid of his old clothes and the chest will scarcely shut for them. The defendant has the only key and it is a curious old-fashioned key. She should have burnt the letters, my lord ——"

She murmured, "But I loved them, my lord"; and he stooped and fondly and long they kissed.

"But she preferred to keep them, my lord, and she kept them stuffed deep among the clothes. This morning she put her hand where she thought they were, and they weren't, my lord. She had no time to search. She was interrupted. My lord, the jury, I am convinced, will realise that the letters are elsewhere among the mound of clothes than where she looked and that if she ever thinks

about them again, which is improbable, my lord ——"

She put up a hand to his mouth. She murmured, "My lord, I read them line by line every day, line by beloved line, my lord."

Again he stooped to her; again fondly and long they kissed; and the door, without premonitory noise, was opened and Swiss Jule stood there.

Clumsily, somehow, they sat themselves apart.

Swiss Jule's inscrutable face regarded them for one briefest moment, that seemed an hour, before he spoke. "Pardon," he then said. "I was looking for my scissors. I have searched everywhere and this moment as I turned the handle I remembered that it was in the bath-room I had them. Pardon."

And he turned and was gone.

Alice whose hand was on her heart was first to speak. "Oh, Conrad!" She pressed her side as though it wrung her.

He got up. He was very white. "He didn't see," he said.

"He must have seen."

"I think he did not. My eye was on the door and I saw it open. We were apart before he clearly had the room."

"Conrad, if he did see!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Conrad, if he did see he will tell."

He came to her and took her hand and patted it. "He didn't see."

Conviction was not in his voice. She withdrew her hand. "Oh, Conrad!"

He crossed the room and stood looking from the window. Suddenly with a snap of his fingers, he turned and came to her. "I am a fool. If he saw, let him tell. I am a doctor, aren't I? I was examining your throat, feel-

ing your pulse, getting something out of your eye." Encouraged by his own encouragement, reacting from his earlier fright, "By God," he cried, "if he tells I will do him down with that and have him kicked out. Charles always has disliked him and believed him a liar and wanted to get rid of him; he often has told me so. By God, he has done for himself this time if he tries that game. By God, I will go right up to him now, say I have come to see Old Gand again, give him an opening and if he takes it ——"

He was afire with a heat hot as if it had been virtue indignant.

"I'll go straight to him."

"Conrad, for God's sake, no!"

He would have carried out his word, but pity for her alarms overbore him. He gave way; he presented again so strongly the case that he would make that she allowed herself to take some courage — a very little, not enough to suffer the thing to be put to the test, but enough, for he could not stay, to be left. He kissed her confidently. "Run straight up now and reassure yourself about those letters. That is two frights you have had today. I have cured one. Tell me tomorrow that I was right about the other."

He scarcely had gone, she still was on the sofa collecting herself sufficiently to go and look again for the letters, when she heard feet down the stairs. She awaited them as one in the condemned cell awaits, on his last morning, the sound of a tread.

Yes, it was Swiss Jule.

She caught her breath and knew the violent sound it made.

Swiss Jule said, "Pardon. Patient has passed."

Patient passed! Old Gand dead! But loud above the tumult of the thought there rang a higher tumult "Re-

prieve? It was not to denounce her that Swiss Jule was come?" The room seemed to go round.

She managed "Dead?"

"Poor Patient, yes. Patient has passed at last."

Her mind was reeling. It staggered tipsily between relief at the blow which had not come and stunning at the unexpectedness of the long expected. The only thing that she could think to say was "Dead? Are you sure he is dead?"; but even in the state she was the grotesqueness of such a question was apparent to her and she did not make it. She said, "I will come with you;" and she advanced and followed Swiss Jule up the stairs. As she went up it was not at all of the death she was thinking; her thought was, "What an extraordinary way to come and tell me! 'Pardon. Patient has passed.' *Was* she reprieved?"

CHAPTER VI

THE LETTERS (II)

They entered the room. She never before had seen death; she could not believe that she saw it now. Old Gand lay precisely as a thousand times she had seen him lying. The aspect of his face, the eyes half-closed, the lower lip dropped and sardonically bunched to one side, was precisely the aspect which daily for months and months it had presented. She had a feeling that there were things she ought to do, kiss that mask-like countenance, go on her knees beside it, pray, cry. She could do none of them. This was not death. She was not in presence of death. Her mind seemed a blank. What had been happening to her just before this? She remembered. She was in the presence of something much more terrible than death. She looked across the bed at Swiss Jule; and because she found Swiss Jule steadily to be regarding her, swiftly away again. She had a terror that if she did not rend her mind of those thoughts they would communicate themselves to Jule and Jule would open them.

She said, "But ——" and stopped; whichever way her words shaped to go it was to the terror that they took her. It stood there in the path of her speech like a sword. She tried again; "But Dr. Bryne saw him, he was perfectly normal then, not ten minutes ago."

"Longer than that, Mrs. Paris."

Straight into the sword! How long had they been together in the drawing-room? She had no idea.

But she must defend this. "It could not have been much

more than ten minutes. He was asleep then when the Doctor left him."

Swiss Jule let the time question go: "Yes, Patient passed in his sleep. Patient is gone from us at last!"

She perceived now that Swiss Jule was affected. He was wiping his eyes.

"When? Just this minute?"

Affected or no, Jule's voice still was his toneless and deliberate voice: "Much longer than that. It would be nearer twenty minutes ago."

"Twenty minutes! But Dr. Bryne was here then."

"Yes, I came in to tell him, you will remember my coming in."

Her heart went ice.

"You said you had come to look for something, your scissors."

"I saw that you were busy."

She looked full at Swiss Jule. Swiss Jule dropped his eyes and smoothed the pillow.

"But if he was dead?"

She was trembling. Swiss Jule smoothed away at the pillow but she could see that it needed no smoothing, that his hand as it passed over it scarcely touched it. His voice came in a murmur, addressed to the pillow, soft as his touch upon it. "Well, there was nothing the doctor could do, was there, nothing at all? I saw that you were busy so I just went off. When I came again, thinking perhaps you would have finished, he was gone."

She must have this out. "Finished what? What do you mean?"

Still smoothing away, still to the pillow, silken still, "Oh, how should I know, Mrs. Paris? That is not for me to know. How should it be?"

O menace! She dared not dare again. What dared she do? She walked to the window. She noticed for the

first time that the blinds were drawn and she went from one to another pulling them where they were not at their full extent. It was Saturday, Charles's day at home for lunch. Charles! He would be in any moment now. She heard her voice say, " I will go and draw the other blinds. It will break the news to my husband."

" So it will," Swiss Jule agreed. His voice was changed. It suddenly, and for the first time ever she had known it have such quality, was fuller, warmer — much more, a human note was in it, a note of sympathetic understanding in the intention she had expressed. She looked at him. He straightened himself from his stooped pose above the pillow and the face he turned towards her also was changed, had a mildness, positively was kind. " Mrs. Paris," he said, " I would like to say, if you will permit me, now that all this is over and that I can speak differently as it were, that of course this is not like an ordinary death, is it? Any time these two years it might have happened and better if it had. Quite kindly one can say that, and quite respectfully, if you will permit me, I would like to say it to you. It has been a strain on you, Mrs. Paris, one way and another; that I know, if I may say so."

She was arrested. She took at once the note he offered her. " A strain yes, in many ways," she said. Was it this death had wrought this change in him? Had he indeed seen nothing in the room downstairs? She desired above all things to placate this man and she went on " You have been very devoted, Jule; we all recognise that."

He bowed. " I was very fond of Patient. What I could do it was a pleasure to me to do. I was fond of Patient and Patient was fond of me, that I do know, Mrs. Paris."

Alice agreed. " I am sure he was." She somehow did not quite like this frequent " Mrs. Paris " in his words,

a kind of edging rather closely to her; but all else was infinitely reassuring; perhaps indeed he had seen nothing. "I am sure he was," she repeated.

Swiss Jule smiled gratefully. "He spoke just before he died."

"He spoke?" She somehow was newly alarmed. Why was she told this only now?

Swiss Jule nodded, sadly smiling. "Dear Patient, yes."

"But you said — in his sleep?"

"He just woke up and opened his eyes and had a sudden little rally — I have seen it happen before like that — and spoke, and then closed his eyes again and then passed away."

"What did he say?"

Swiss Jule looked embarrassed and said he was embarrassed. He gave a little shred of a diffident cough. "Well, it is difficult, awkward for me to say, Mrs. Paris. It was about me."

"About you?"

Again the diffident shred. "About leaving me some money; that is what makes it so awkward for me to say, you see, isn't it?"

"But you do not tell me."

Swiss Jule looked down and fumbled the sheet between his fingers. His manner, abashed, hesitant, was extraordinarily different from former occasions. "Why, you see, Mrs. Paris, I knew that the last Will Patient made he had made just before I came here, when I was secretary, because he told me. He told me everything, you know. This last two years he never was able to make any change in it, much though he wanted to, that also I knew."

"What did he say?"

Swiss Jule twisted the sheet. "Oh, nothing of any consequence, of course, Mrs. Paris. Just that he wanted

to show his gratitude, dear Patient, for what I had done for him."

Alice hated this man but she was afraid of this man. After all, that Jule should be recompensed was natural enough. "I can quite understand that, Jule," she said.

Swiss Jule looked up, warmly pleased. "Oh, thank you, Mrs. Paris, I'm sure. Well, what he said just before he died — what he said was — it is difficult for me to say it, but I am sure you do understand — what he said was that he wanted me to have a thousand pounds."

Alice was amazed. In the life she lived she thought in money values no higher than tens. A thousand pounds seemed to her an incredible, a monstrous sum. She exclaimed, "A thousand pounds!"

Swiss Jule nodded. "That is what he said. 'I want you to have out of my money a thousand pounds'; those were his words. 'That is my last wish,' he said."

"It is extraordinary."

"Well, I only just mention it, Mrs. Paris, you understand, being his last words, you see. Of course if I had had a witness it would have been different, but not having any witness — well," Swiss Jule shrugged his shoulders, "there's nothing to be said, is there?"

"I don't quite see there is — no."

Swiss Jule suddenly straightened his pose. "But there is, though, Mrs. Paris." The diffidence, the awkwardness, were gone. His voice, with his straightening, had a straightness of ring. "There is just one thing to be said. A thousand pounds is a lot of money to feel you might have had and must lose just because there wasn't no witness to his last wish. So there is just one thing, Mrs. Paris — knowing me as you do, Mrs. Paris, I suppose you couldn't say that you knew Patient said I was to have a thousand pounds?"

There was that in his tone, in his swift change of man-

ner which caused Alice to clench the fingers of her hands. "Say I knew it? However could I say I knew it?"

"Well, of course you couldn't in one way. When I say, though, knowing me as you do, what I mean is"—he looked directly at her and the look was the old look, penetrative, meaning—"What I mean is, me knowing you as I do, Mrs. Paris."

He stopped and Alice said nothing.

"Perhaps you hadn't thought of that?" Swiss Jule said.

Alice's fingers that had been clenched, now were terribly constricted. "What is it that you mean?"

"Why, I have said it, Mrs. Paris. Me knowing you as I do, you couldn't say, I suppose, that you were here when he died and witness to what he said."

"I absolutely do not understand you."

Swiss Jule said like a rap: "I think you do."

He was declared. She knew him now. The mask was off his face; the button off his foil. Nothing was for it now. She must fight.

Like a rap again: "I think you do."

God, yes, must fight! She took all her courage in her hands: "Are you being insolent?"

"Why should I be insolent, Mrs. Paris? I'm just giving you an offer. Could you have been witness to what Patient said, that's all I'm asking?"

"I feel that you are being insolent."

"I'm just asking you, could you have been witness?"

"You have had your answer."

"I'll take it then." A common sound was coming in his speech; his mask dropped off, his educated English seemed to go. "I'll take it then, Mrs. Paris. It doesn't matter so much to me. If I'm to lose a thousand pounds I've got the worth of it, I reckon."

Alice said nothing. She was shaking.

Swiss Jule went on. "There's little trifles he always kept under his pillow. Not his watch or anything; there's his watch on the table there. I could keep them, I suppose?"

"It would be for my husband to decide."

"That's just what I thought." Swiss Jule put his hand to the pillow. "There's just his handkerchief and ——" He put his hand beneath the pillow. "I'll show Mr. Paris and ask him," and he drew forth his hand.

A packet of letters tied with blue ribbon was in his hand.

Alice caught at a chair and sat down heavily.

She scarcely knew her voice when she was able, at last, to speak. It was dry, not as dryness of voice commonly is understood, but as if it came, not from lips, but from between husks where blood or life or any softness was not. "Ah, you are a thief," her voice said.

"There's worse words — to a woman — than thief," Swiss Jule said.

They remained then quite silent for quite two minutes; their breathing audible, for both were breathing hard, to one another; the dead man between them.

Alice got up then, very slowly, as if her limbs too were siccated, jointless, nerveless, and very slowly went towards the door.

As she reached it, "Mind you, I've never been one to make trouble," Swiss Jule said.

Alice dragged on.

"There's no trouble here that I can see, Mrs. Paris."

Alice turned and presented to the other an ashen face. "There is ruin," she said. "You know it."

"There isn't. There's nothing."

"What do you mean now?"

"There's two places, Mrs. Paris, for these letters.

One's back of the fire and you shall see me put them in, and one's in Mr. Paris's hands, and that I don't want any more than you, I'm sure."

"What is it that you do want?"

"It's nothing at all — not to you; no, nor to anyone else in a way of speaking. It's just to have you witness that Patient said what I said he said."

Alice said, astounding herself, "Of course he never said it. Of course you are a liar as well as a thief."

Swiss Jule shrugged his shoulders: "Oh, anyone can call names." As if suddenly the names had sunken into him his face became venomous. "But it's dangerous for you, Mrs. Paris." He started and had a listening attitude. "There *is* Mr. Paris coming up. Mind you, name what names you like, I'm being friendly. I'm asking nothing of you. Your word may not get me the money; how do I know it will? I'll take my chance of that. I'm not robbing you; I'm not robbing anyone. It's coming out of Patient's pocket if it comes, and glad he'd be to know it, I'm sure." Charles was on the landing. "You've got to choose, Mrs. Paris, and quick. Or I shall."

Charles came in.

Charles looked ghastly. His hands were shaking. "What has happened? The blinds ——?" He looked at the bed. "Is he dead?"

Alice said, "Yes, dead, Charles."

Charles went over to the bed and peered. "Good God, dead? Good God, dead?" He turned to Alice. "When?"

"Just now, just a little while ago."

He turned and stared again. "I must have been coming along from the station. Good God, I must have been just walking along." He put his hands to the sides of his head and pressed them there. "Good God, dead!" He began to kneel and before his knees had touched the ground was up again. "I don't know what I am doing."

He put the outer side of his left thumb in his mouth, the palm and fingers twisted up before his face and bit it and stood staring. "I can't think." He turned about. "How did it happen? Who was here?"

Swiss Jule looked at Alice; Alice did not speak.

Swiss Jule said, "Me and Mrs. Paris, Mr. Paris."

Charles said to Alice, "You were here, were you?"

Her voice, scarcely to be heard, said "Yes."

"Well, well, what happened, what happened?"

"Charles, he just passed away."

He muttered, "Passed away! Good God, passed away!" He said, "In his sleep?"

Alice looked at Swiss Jule. Swiss Jule standing behind Charles and between him and the fire had his hands behind his back. Alice said, "In his sleep, yes."

Swiss Jule brought his hands before him. The packet was covered with his fingers, his thumbs behind it. "Just a minute before, though, Mr. Paris, Patient had opened his eyes, and Patient spoke."

"Spoke?"

"Quite clearly, Patient did, didn't he, Mrs. Paris?"

Alice said, "Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He thanked"— her voice seemed to catch and stick — "Jule."

"Ah, nothing else? Nothing about us? Nothing about me?"

"Nothing, Charles. He thanked Jule." She wiped her face with her handkerchief. "And he said that out of his money he wanted Jule to have —" she wiped her face again, "a thousand pounds."

Swiss Jule turned and attended to the fire.

CHAPTER VII

THE SANCTUARY

IMMEDIATELY upon the death of Old Gand events of very great moment arose and followed one the other in the lives of that small world (the persons of this book) from which he is the first to pass away. That very old man, dumb prisoner within the body that was his cell, for years had had no more active influence upon events than an obscure captive thrown by some autocrat into his dungeons and there forgotten. He was discharged; and it was as though with his discharge by death all things began to happen; as though that powerless hand had held immobile forces which, with the beginning of its corruption, were released to action.

It might be so. Each thing about us, Sim once had pondered, stands in relation to, dies and hands on its office to, some other thing; incidence, Miss Marr once had propounded, is the bearing of one thing upon another. One life is withdrawn from the lives here stacked and the pile shifts, settles, makes new angles of its parts.

It was five of the afternoon when Sim was handed the snarl that was Charles's telegram, and it was the snarl that caused him within two hours to be on his way to London. "Perhaps you will come this time." The snarl caused in him an immense compassion for Charles. K.O.H. Kingdom of Heaven. He had come straight from a house where was established the spirit of this most happy Kingdom, straight from revelation to him of why within the atmosphere of that house he had always

felt himself to be within touch of the truth he sought, straight from the immense disclosures which he felt to be in this new knowledge; and in Charles's snarling telegram he held in his hand the challenge, saw with his mental eye the desolation, of a heart where only bitterness and turmoil was, no peace. Poor, poor old Charles!

There was no sort of practical use, much less practical necessity, in going to Charles at once, that night. The seven o'clock train from Barton Magna only could be caught and travelled in by much inconvenience; London not reached till after ten, Blackheath not arrived at much before midnight, and Charles (Sim could hear him) more likely than not finding new grievance in his arrival at so untimely an hour. No practical use or necessity was in it; but as he rushed his preparations for the journey by which, nevertheless, to do it, Sim's own words to Andrew touching the Redskins and the Palefaces came back to him: "Why make of everything a practical matter, a business matter, a matter of principle? Why not a human matter?" The recollection filled him in part with a tingling buoyancy, in part with a profound awe; a tingling: the thought that it was the human and not the practical side that at once he had seen and was acting upon; an awe: the thought that in those words to Andrew, as in every decisive action and thought since first his Purpose had begun to work in him, he had been steadily though unconsciously working towards that which he was sure contained the truth he sought — the spirit of the Kingdom of Heaven.

He had an hour to spare in London before a connection on to Blackheath was available. From Barton Magna he had sent telegram to Andrew as well as to Charles and, arrived, he took Mayfair Street on his way.

Andrew was alone: Linda was out. Sim went past the servant who, admitting him, gave him this information,

and into the study where he was told Andrew was. Something strange was in Andrew's manner, Sim thought; something stranger yet he found in Linda's whom, unexpectedly, he saw before he left.

He opened the study door. Andrew was standing before the fire, hands in pockets, head bent. He appeared to be in deep thought, so deep that he was not aroused by Sim's appearance, did not lift his gaze until Sim spoke.

"Niggs!"

Andrew very slowly raised his head. His air was extraordinarily preoccupied, his face extraordinarily overcast. He looked at Sim but did not appear to realise his presence.

Sim came forward.

"Niggs, old man, how goes it?"

"Oh, pretty good, Sim."

Only — this time — the palest ghost of that swift-come and swift-gone smile with which always Andrew signalled this response. He roused himself but his face remained iron hard, his voice stony. He extended his hand. "I quite forgot you were coming, Sim."

"It is only a dash in. I must go in half-an-hour. Poor Old Gand, eh, Niggs?"

"Ah, yes, poor Old Gand."

The tone was that which touches, perfunctorily, a bygone recollection, remote, of no concern.

"But poor old Charles, I am thinking most," Sim said. "This will rattle poor old Charles, Niggs."

"I suppose it will."

Sim regarded him.

"Niggs!"

"Well?"

"Nothing up, is there, old man?"

"Nothing."

"I thought you seemed a bit hipped."

Andrew let the suggestion pass unanswered. "Do you want food, drink?"

"I could do with a drink. I fed on the train."

Andrew touched a bell. While they waited the answer and when, answered, a tray was brought, Sim spoke of the circumstances that had brought him up. No deep sentiment could attach to Old Gand's passing, but much was recalled by the event; and Sim recalled to Andrew many incidents all touched, to Old Gand's credit, with that soft brush with which kind Time, that mild physician of our frets, strong Death, that flinchless surgeon of our wrongs, heal or obliterate all that had a sting, colour anew and warmly all that had good report. Andrew, if he listened at all, listened without comment of a single word. No subject can run single-handedly for long. Sim stretched himself. "Oh, well!" he said and dismissed it. "How is Linda?"

"Linda is all right."

"Out on the spree somewhere of course?"

Andrew said, "You may be perfectly sure of that."

His tone, extraordinarily hard, caused Sim to look at him, surprised. He spoke again and the words came with a suddenness and with a hardness as of a pent emotion suddenly escaped. "Does it occur to you," he said, "that straight on the top of this news was not precisely the night for her to go out?"

Sim was entirely surprised. The idea never had come to him; that Andrew should present it was astonishing. "Why, no," he said, "no, it doesn't, Niggs."

"It occurs to me," said Andrew. He shut his mouth like a trap; and immediately, as if that trap had snapped upon and held it, there flashed before Sim's mental eyes Linda at the station seeing him off to Barton Magna and her strange, sudden exclamation: "Sim, sometimes Andrew looks at me and I have a feeling——"

He said: "Niggs, old man, I absolutely do not see it. Old Gand's death in all the circumstances is little enough to any of us; it is nothing at all to Linda ——"

The trap opened. "Would you say that my wishes equally should be nothing at all?"

Sim got up. "I say, old man, I don't much like this."

He had put a hand on Andrew's arm. Andrew turned to look at the clock behind him; his action shook away the hand. "If you are going to catch that train ——"

"Niggs, you are not having some tiff with Linda?"

"You will miss that train."

"I have time yet. Old man, it is not for me to butt in ——"

Andrew said, "It is not." He held out his hand. "Goodnight, Sim."

The door opened; Linda, a glittering evening wrap about her, stood there.

She began, "I didn't ——" She saw Sim. "Oh, Sim!" She came to him very impulsively and impulsively gave him her hand. "Sim, you are staying the night?"

Her voice, all her gesture, had a pleading note. Her hand was very cold, he thought. He held it while he said, "I am booked for Charles. He is expecting me. I am this minute off."

"Oh," she said — a sigh it might have been — and dropped his hand and turned to Andrew. "I didn't go on to the dance. I changed my mind. I have come back."

Andrew said, "So I perceive."

Sim saw her eyelids flicker as though she winced. She turned to him. "The car can take you on. It is waiting. I will see you in."

"A message for Charles?" Sim asked of Andrew.

"Tell him I will 'phone him first thing in the morning."

"I will. Goodnight, old man."

"Goodnight, Sim."

Descending the stairs, Linda said nothing. At the foot she turned to him. "Sim, I have had a hell of a row with Andrew."

"Linda!"

"Oh, hell's own row." She was smiling but it was no smile that he had ever known from her; here was pale parting only of her lips and it contrasted with the gay radiance that was her normal smile to speak more sharply to her feelings than if she had been grave.

"Linda, you can't have had; not a real row."

Even the pale smile was gone. "We have, Sim."

"But it is impossible — you and Niggs. Whatever about?"

"Oh, things. I can't tell you now. I wish you had been staying the night, Sim."

He thought of Charles —"Perhaps you will come this time;" aggrieved, almost for certain, at his arriving so late; worse aggrieved, beyond a doubt, if, having said he was coming, he did not come; sorely in need of human help. But human help, most clear to see, much needed, too, in this poor lovely creature, always so radiant, so forlorn now. "Would you like me to stay, Linda?"

She seemed to consider. She put out a hand to him. "Sim, do you remember my saying to you when I was seeing you off to Barton that I wished to God you were not going?"

"I remember it well. It troubled me."

"I didn't know how truly I spoke. I said it because I had caught Andrew looking at me sometimes — frighteningly. Well, I was right in what I thought; since then it has happened."

He put his other hand to the hand she had extended to him. "But, Linda, you amaze me. Frighteningly? Hap-

pened? You can't possibly tell me you are frightened of Andrew?"

She would have spoken but her lips quivered. It utterly distressed him. Upon a countenance so exquisite, so exquisitely pleasure-ground of mirth, it was an emotion distressing to the heart as bird, as butterfly, brought quivering to earth.

"Linda!" he cried; "Linda!"

She said, "Not frightened of him, Sim. Sim, frightened — of losing him."

"Losing him! Linda, he worships you."

She shook her head. "Sim, Andrew doesn't love me."

He stared. He could have thought her mad.

"Linda, you must be crazy. Not love you! You make me laugh."

"Ah, don't laugh. Sim, what Andrew loves — do you remember what you said to me at the station when I asked you what you thought of me?"

He smiled at her. "I remember it perfectly. I said 'the jolliest, the loveliest ——'"

She stopped him. "That is what Andrew loves."

He still smiled. "Whatever is the difference?"

She said, "All Andrew loves is just the surface, Sim: Just what you call the loveliness; just this —" she made with her hand a gesture, touching her face, indicating from head to foot her person. "Just that." She pointed to where across the hall a great wall mirror stood and showed her. "Just that; the picture."

"Who would wonder? Isn't it you?"

"He is getting tired of it, Sim."

"Preposterous!"

"It isn't, Sim. Sim, when first I used to catch Andrew sitting and looking at me as I have told you, I would smile, he would smile, the look would go. That

was this, the picture. Then it grew longer before it went. Then it came oftener and was longer still. Then it began to last all through a meal, all of a day. Then, a week ago, and now again to-day ——"

She left imagination to supply her words.

His feeling was that her imagination must have drawn the other. Some truth there must be, her distress was certain sign of that; he had seen Andrew, too; seen that grim and steely blackness, that trap-like shutting of his jaw. But that her feelings could be real, that Andrew had in her a picture, a plaything only ——

He took her hand again and ran his fingers softly up her naked arm and smiled at her. "It is absurd," he said. "How can he love the lovely picture that you are and yet not love you who are the lovely picture? Oh, absurd; you just have let a little tiff upset you. Why, Niggs would tear his heart out for you, you know he would. Go right up to him now and be the lovely Linda that you are and see. Do you want me to stay the night? I think, now you have told me all this, better not. I think just be our lovely Linda alone with him and you will be sorry you ever told me."

She seemed to be considering as she had considered before. "I think you are right. Yes, go now, Sim. But you will come back? Come, now you are up, and stay a day or two, Sim."

"As soon as ever I can leave Charles," he promised.

She stood a moment, still considering. She suddenly raised her face to his.

"Kiss me, Sim."

He stooped and kissed her, patting her shoulder. "Our lovely Linda."

"Dear Sim," she said; and turned from him and took the stairs.

Perturbed, he also turned, taking himself now from

where distress had not been looked for to where he knew most well that he would find distress.

He did.

He found Charles, as he had expected, aggrieved at the outset at the lateness of his arrival. Charles opened the front door to him and his first words, prefaced by no greeting, struck the measure of his aggrievance. "The servants have all gone to bed," he said, taking Sim's hand and immediately releasing it. "So has Alice. I never imagined you would arrive at this hour of the night."

"I thought I would come at once. How are you, Charles?"

"There was not the least need. There is absolutely nothing you can do."

"Well, I daresay you will find there will be a lot of little things one way and another. Anyway, there are you and Alice to look after. This is a bad business for you, old man."

Charles led the way into the dining room. "I am accustomed to bad businesses," he said.

"Poor old man! But, Charles, it is going to be better for you now in a good many ways."

Charles said sharply, "How do I know that?"

"Well, it has been a tie on you in many ways and a tie that served no purpose, did no good. Poor Old Gand. Tell me about it, Charles; how did it happen?"

Charles disregarded the question. "You say better for me. You say better for me." His face was working and his sentences stammering. "You say better for me. That just shows how little you have thought, you or Andrew or any of you, about what a tie it has been or about where I am now it is"—he snapped his fingers, he was moving about, his hands and his face going all the time—"*snapped.* Perhaps I am"—he snapped

again —" *snapped* too. How do I know where I am? I am in the dark. I always have been in the dark."

Sim watched him, pained for him. " You mean about his affairs? "

Charles faced him across the table; and to the increase of Sim's pain for him actually leaned forward and struck the table while he spoke. " I will tell you where I am. It will surprise you. I am grieved, I am sorry, and I am the only one of you all that *is* grieved " (he smote the table) " that that old man is gone. I was accustomed to him. I grumbled at it but I was accustomed to it and now I look back and I see how he relied on me and trusted me and I tell you that I *miss* him." (Again the blow upon the table.)

He turned away and crossed the room and stared, back to Sim, at a picture on the wall. Sim was shocked at the state he was in. It was clear that his nerves were raw as if they were sticking through his flesh. His manner, the way in particular in which he jumped from one aspect to another, from how he might be practically affected by this death to how he was emotionally affected by it, made him almost incoherent. He turned suddenly about from the picture and had jumped to another aspect. " You ask me how it happened; good God, it just "— he threw apart his hands —" happened. It was this morning ——" He stopped. " Good God, this morning only; it seems to me a year ago. This morning; I was just walking home from the station; far as I can make out I must have been just by Phillips's, the tobacconist. I remember I stopped there wondering if I wanted any cigarettes over the weekend and then remembered I didn't. I believe, absolutely believe that in that very minute when I stopped — flick, gone! "

He stared at Sim as if only now aware of his presence.

Sim went quickly round the table to him. " Poor old

Charles; this has been a shock to you; no wonder. Sit down, old man."

Charles, suddenly limp, quiescent, suffered himself to be directed to a chair at the table. He dropped into it and dropped forward his head on his arms. "I'm all in, Sim," he said.

Sim patted the bent shoulders. "I'm jolly glad I came, Charles. I will have you all out before I go."

"I can't think," Charles said.

"You are thinking too much, old man. You leave all the thinking to me."

Precisely as the door suddenly had opened when he was with Andrew, now when with Charles it opened. Precisely as Linda, now Alice.

Her hair was down. She wore a wrapper. She looked very ill, Sim thought.

Her eyes at the level of Sim, she was about to greet him, when her vision took in Charles, bowed on the table. "Oh, Charles!" her words were, and she went to him and stooped over him.

The note on which she spoke, her quick movement to him, her poise above him, hands on his shoulders, hair streaming down as in caress, comprised an address towards him tenderly maternal. It touched Sim. It had in it something very much out of the ordinary; and an impression that, pitiable though indeed was Charles's state, she was for some reason much more than ordinarily concerned for him, came to Sim and grew upon him. She appeared to him in a few moments they now were together to be somehow and for some reason deeply sorry for Charles with the sorrow of one who was herself responsible for what she saw.

But her own state called for sympathy.

"I came down for Charles," she presently was saying. "I thought you could not be coming, Sim. I was listen-

ing for you. I think I must have fallen asleep." She shuddered violently. It was as though she had said, "I overbalanced and fell", and shuddered at the recollection.

Charles by this had agreed with suggestion from Sim that bed was the best place for them all and, quieter now, was going to the door, Alice attending him, speaking as she did so.

Sim called, "Alice, you are frozen. You are simply shivering."

She controlled herself, "It is Charles who is cold." She had a hand of his in both of hers. "Charles, you do need sleep so much. You can find your room, Sim? Everything is ready for you."

"Right, old girl. I am so glad you came down to carry Charles off. A good night's rest is what you both want badly. And, Alice, Charles, on my way up I will just look in on Old Gand; I suppose I can?"

Charles took his arm from Alice. "Yes, yes; you will want to do that. I had thought of that. I will come with you."

"No, no, man. You are not to think of it, Charles. You go to bed."

"Well, Alice must. One of us ought to. It is the right thing that one of us should." He was becoming agitated again, voice rising, hands working. "Alice — no, it is no good asking Alice. I must go with you."

Sim looked at Alice; she was looking piteously at Charles. "Charles, there is not the least need," Sim said. "I would rather go alone."

Charles said, "Well, I say that one of us ought to go with you." His earlier manner was fully upon him again. "I say that it is the right thing. It is no good asking Alice. Alice won't go near the room."

Alice said: "Charles, how can you say that?"

Charles broke out, "Because I have asked you; I have asked you over and over again ——"

"But I have been in with you, Charles."

"Yes, but after tea I asked you; after dinner I asked you ——" He turned to Sim.

"That Jule has been up there 'watching' as he called it and I wanted Alice to go up and turn him out. It wasn't for me to do it. It was easier for ——"

"Charles, do go to bed, old man. Honestly I prefer to go in to Old Gand alone. Jule is not there now, is he?"

"No, but he has been there the whole day, right up to an hour ago."

"He was fond of Old Gand, Charles."

"Gand was fond of him. He is to have a thousand pounds from him."

Sim opened his eyes. "A thousand pounds! But, Charles, you have not seen his Will?"

Charles broke out, "Of course I have not seen his Will. Didn't I tell you I was all in the dark about his affairs? The Will is at his Bank. I am going up for it to-morrow. This wasn't his Will. This was his wish, his last wish just before he died."

"He spoke, then?"

"Spoke, yes, and that was all he said; just about Jule; just — tell Sim, Alice."

She was moved to the door. Her murmur came, "Please, you tell, Charles."

Charles gave an impatient exclamation, "Tch! It is extraordinary to me how exasperating you are about this, Alice."

"Charles, I wish I had never heard it."

He made an angry gesture. "What ever is the good of wishing that? He said it to you." He turned to Sim. "I understood first that it was to Jule he spoke." He

was at Alice again. "I still am sure I was told that first, Alice."

Her lips moved but she said nothing. She put her hand to her throat.

He rounded impatiently away. "I thought it so much that I suppose I gave Jule the impression that I attached no importance to it. But he came down after we had left the room and told me that it was to Alice Old Gand said it — that he said 'Tell Charles' to her." He rounded again. "Why you didn't make that clear to me when you saw I thought the other —— ?"

"Charles, how could I keep on about it?"

This was painful. Charles was in a pitiable state; Alice, watching him so sorrowfully, distressed so utterly, pitiable equally. Sim said, "Old man, anyway the whole thing can wait."

"How do you mean *wait*? Wait for what?"

"Why, Charles, till you know how his affairs stand. A thousand pounds is a lot of money."

But the suggestion made Charles worse. "Well, what if it is? It is my affair, isn't it? The message was to me; not to you or to Andrew. There's not going to be a wrangle about it, is there? Surely to God after all I have been through and am going through I am not going to have a wrangle put on me?"

Sim came over to him smiling and took him by the shoulders. "You are going to bed, old man; that's what is going to be put on you. Off with him, Alice."

Tone and touch had effect. As earlier he had collapsed over the table, so now but more completely Charles at last relaxed. He wiped his eyes. "I'm dog tired, Sim," he said; and he suffered himself to be led from the room. At their bedroom door he said, "If I have been making scenes, Sim, you must make allowances. Do you see that right up to the very end of this thing I have had a duty

heaped on to me?" His voice though strangely quiet now seemed by the expression of his face to be as it were twisted out of him. He put his hands to the sides of his head. "Do you see how even a death like this can't happen near me but some burden, some worrying thing to do, is shifted on to me? I can't go on like this, Sim. I always get it somehow, Sim; always. I'm not strong enough now for it, old man."

Alice was stepped into the bedroom. Sim thought he heard her crying.

He went along the passage and quietly into the room where Old Gand lay. The lights were burning. He lifted the veil that lay upon Old Gand's face and stood and looked upon the prison whence the prisoner now was gone.

What peace!

Was this a prison?

What peace! Here was no prison — a sanctuary was here.

He knelt.

Prayer had not been his habit when last he stood within this room. Had he knelt then he would have knelt with the mind and in the attitude of suppliants who only in the hour of need, only in last resort when every human trick is tried and done, present themselves — would have knelt, as the phrase is, "before God." He knelt now and now made prayer in what he knew, with knowledge as certain as exquisite, to be the living presence of his God.

"Remember, O God who pitieth, this very old man's long road; remember his uprightness, remember his courage, remember his fondness for my father, his love for my mother; remember his wish that she should bring us up in thy knowledge and love; remember his long and

grievous suffering; and these remembering, receive him, O God to whom the weary turn, into thy infinite compassion."

He raised his eyes and looked again upon that sanctuary that had been prison cell.

What peace!

His thoughts ran back. He saw Old Gand as he had known him, fierce, rugged, threatening, man of storm and fear. Was this the face that had been fortress of those wraths? What peace! His thoughts rehearsed the day. The day! Could it be possible that in this very day he had made journey of a hundred miles, come through that blackness that was Andrew, those fears of Linda's, those tempests that were Charles, Alice and her distress and tears? What tumults! Here — here in the utter silence of this room, scented of flowers from those blossoms on the folded hands, here in that sanctuary for which this silence and this incense were, what peace!

What peace!

He suddenly was made aware that his mind, working without volition of his own, had merged from its rapt contemplation of that peace to an interrogation: What peace? He dwelt upon it. What peace? What was this peace was here? Of what this perfect calm, this rest serene, this exquisite tranquillity? What peace was this? Surely some key to it, some thought approaching it, had on this very day been in his mind? What? He searched his mind. How had the tumults of this day first found him? How was he occupied when first they broke upon him? There had been, surely, some huge significance had happened to him when first they came? Ah! He felt his spirit leap within him in bound of sudden recognition. K.O.H. kindness!

Kingdom of Heaven kindness — spirit of the Kingdom of Heaven!

That had been it! That was the huge significance which early in the day had come to him! Revelation, that huge significance had been, that in realisation of the spirit of the Kingdom of Heaven lay somewhere the truth he sought, the faith that would satisfy, the truth that he could understand. And now? Now was that huge significance seeking with this exquisite serenity upon the bed to make some fellow-meaning, some connection? What connection? "What peace was here?" he had been asking. Was this an answer to his question that was struggling in him? "What peace?"— and suddenly the struggling answer seemed to gather, break and whelm within him: "Kingdom of Heaven peace."

Kingdom of Heaven peace!

Kingdom of Heaven peace? What out of that? More, more was wanted to his understanding. Kingdom of Heaven peace, this sanctuary of peace that he saw here? What out of that? He caught his breath. Could it be, could his truth that he sought for be, that Kingdom of Heaven was set within us all — stood forth, in exquisite serenity revealed, when by death's infinite compassion was drawn away the spirit that had marred and hidden it?

The Kingdom of Heaven in us all?

He bowed himself upon the bed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAITERS

THINGS, to Sim's relief, were better on the morrow. In the morning Swiss Jule left, and Alice, who had stayed in bed, unexpectedly came down to lunch and somehow seemed to have a freer air; in the afternoon the Will was heard, and Charles, after the Will, was almost curiously composed.

That Jule should leave at once, feeling that now he would be "only in the way", had been the attendant's own proposal and Charles, relating it to Sim, spoke highly of him for it. "As to Old Gand's wish," he said, "I told Jule I would write to him after I knew how his affairs stood. He said I was not to think of writing until after the funeral. I think he showed very nice feeling in both those ways. I think Alice ought to have said goodbye to him. It was absurd saying she was too ill to see him. It looked bad. Alice doesn't seem to consider the position I am placed in. She keeps on and on only that she is sorry she ever heard what Old Gand said. What good does that do?"

Charles in this matter, and with every other turn of the morning, was in state of nerves deplorable to witness. Watching him, looking at him especially as he sat restlessly in the train going up for the appointment at Old Gand's bank, Sim was filled with an infinite pity for him. The Kingdom of Heaven in each one of us? All through the night he had lain cherishing and developing what he believed to be this new and tremendous revelation to him. The beauty of infancy and childhood when the human

spirit not yet had soiled that Kingdom, the exquisite serenity of faces — take old Yeoman's — whose spirit had enlarged that Kingdom within them, were not these all in part with the profound and lovely peace of death that had revealed that Kingdom to him? His ranging mind found proof on proof. "For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven"— man had been told it in Christ's own words. "Thy Kingdom come . . . on earth as in heaven"— man had been told it with the very first words, after the invocation, that Christ had bid man pray.

In every man that Kingdom? With infinite pity he looked on this poor Charles, with infinite desire longed for courage — words — to try to tell him. . . .

He had not courage.

At the bank was Andrew, reserved, indifferent, no signal in his attitude to Sim of last night's brooding storm, no signal in his attitude to Charles of a concern for Charles's obvious plight, no signal in his attitude towards the manager who received them of any reaction to the reason that had brought them here. He faced Sim across the table in the manager's office, Charles faced the manager.

"We, that is the bank, are named executors," the manager began, breaking the seals of the envelope he had produced; "that I know; and the date, I see, has been pencilled here on the envelope."

He named it.

"Year of my marriage," Charles said jerkily.

His elbows were on the table. He was plucking at his lips. The manager began to read.

It was a curious document.

"I frequently see," it began, "in newspaper reports of Wills the phrase, 'Having given largely to charities during my lifetime I now make no charitable

bequests, providing herein only for those I leave behind me.' With me the contrary is the case. During my lifetime I have never given one single pennypiece to charity; I propose now to give the whole to charity."

Andrew glanced at Charles, who now with squeezed-up eyes sat digging with his fingers at his forehead, and looked from Charles across to Sim.

"During my lifetime," the reading voice continued, "I have provided for those I leave — my friend James Paris and his sons, children of the said James Paris and my late niece — in a manner that certainly they would not have enjoyed but for me. I leave them each and all well established in their several professions and that is all that I do propose to leave them."

Andrew, his eye again run on to Sim from Charles, shrugged in the smallest degree his shoulders.

To my friend and partner James Paris I give the lease of the offices of Still and Paris, the goodwill and all and everything pertaining thereto. Should he predecease me I give these similarly to his son Charles. To James Paris also (or him failing to the said Charles) I give the sum of fifteen hundred pounds charging the said James or the said Charles to carry out with this sum any wishes, charitable, gifts to employes, or other desires, that I may have expressed to him; the residue, if any, to remain with him for his own use and pleasure."

Sim raised his eyes about the table. Andrew, leaning back, was gazing at the ceiling; Charles, his elbows off the table now, was staring, as the saying is, into space.

The manager was reading: "The residue of my estate I give equally between the following charitable institutions . . ." Charles appeared not to be listening. His face had lost its twisted look. His eyes, on space, were wide, unpuckered. The word for his expression was "rapt", lost in some imagining that he appeared to see. What was he thinking about? Sim watched him, wondering. . . .

"The residue," the manager was saying, "so far as I can tell you at the moment, will be in the region of sixty thousand pounds." With a gesture of inviting examination he laid the Will between the brothers.

"Well, well," said Andrew and looked at his watch and with a quick movement arose. "I must get off."

The movement aroused Charles. Sim saw him come as with a start from his rapt preoccupation. He sat up. "I have the business?" he questioned; "and fifteen hundred pounds?"

"Clearly," the manager said. "As to the money, any wishes of Mr. Still will no doubt be known to you."

Charles's murmur was heard: "A thousand — five hundred." He drew an immense breath. He might have been a man realising the ambition of a life-time.

They went out; Andrew obviously intent on getting off, Sim with a hand in Charles's arm, Charles irresponsive, deeply absorbed.

"Charles," Andrew said outside, "I am glad you have got the business, as of course you were bound to, without any fuss or restrictions." His car was waiting; he was urgent, he had said, to get to a board-meeting. He shook Charles's hand as he got in. "Good, I am glad you are fixed all right. What is this Sim was telling me as we came in about a thousand pounds to the nurse?"

Charles said absently: "Yes, that was his wish; he said it to Alice."

"Ah, well, that is your affair, of course."

Charles looked up. "Of course he will have it," he said. His voice and air were those of a man working a sum in his mind and holding it balanced while he spoke. "Of course he will have it. It is the right thing."

Andrew said, "No doubt." In matters of rectitude only one aspect ever presented itself to Andrew; and his tone, indifferent, was the indifference of a statement of the obvious. He seated himself. "It rather slumps your fifteen hundred though," he commented.

"It leaves five hundred. Five hundred means a lot to me," Charles said. His voice suddenly had an excitation, his eyes a spark; he suggested suddenly a schoolboy with a tip and with some mighty plan. "And everything clear, settled," he said.

He looked up and about him; his normal poise was looking down.

Andrew swung-to the door. "Well, I will be down for the funeral. Sim, you must come to us afterwards." He nodded and was driven away; and the two left, who had declined a lift, set to walk to their station.

It was Sim who had declined the lift. He had had the idea that the fresh air of a walk would do Charles good. But Charles, as they walked, was entirely changed from the manner which, observed by Sim as they came up in the train and again at first across the banker's table, had caused him the idea. Relapsed from that sudden spark of his, Charles was back now into the air of absorption which had come upon him with the closing of the Will and in which he first had spoken with Andrew; but the gleam of that spark somehow still was in the absorption. His mind was not brooding, it seemed actively engaged; it was not standing, it seemed to be pursuing. Sim, but more fully and genially, spoke the congratulations that Andrew had made. Charles scarcely replied.

Changing the subject might be better, Sim thought, and he said, "Charles, what was that little red rosette that manager man was wearing on his left arm? I have noticed quite a few people wearing one. Look, there is a woman there with it."

Charles neither looked nor answered.

Uncommunicative, self-absorbed, yet always with that curious air of inward, secret excitement, he remained not only through the journey home but in the days following, up to the funeral and after the funeral. Something very new clearly was occupying his mind. It was not worry, Sim, watching him, determined. He seemed to have done worrying. He still fidgeted, still was restless; but he fidgeted now only as it were not to be fidgeted; he began to give Sim the impression that Sim's presence in the house fidgeted him; and when, after the funeral, Sim, noticing this, spoke of going, he made no pretence but that this would well suit him. "Yes, don't you stop any longer, Sim," he said — almost eagerly, Sim thought. "There is not the least need. It was good of you to come and it has been good having you. But now everything is over there is no reason at all for you to stay, none whatever. When will suit you to go? Tomorrow?"

Sim took the news of his departure to Alice and her reception of it caused him to give a little laugh. In her too he had noticed in these days a preoccupation, the appearance as of an effort in making conversation with him, and when now she said, "Oh, must you go, Sim?" he appreciated in her tone an effort, unsuccessful, at regret. He laughed. "Alice, you don't break down and weep, I notice. Charles certainly wants to be rid of me; I believe that you do too."

It surprised him how she coloured, as though guiltily. "Sim, how can you say that?"

"Well, Charles wants me to go; he makes no bones about it, old Charles."

She avoided the direct subject. "But I think Charles is much better in the last few days," she said.

Sim's voice had a pensive note. "I don't know that I would say better. Better in one way perhaps; less — less rattled; not better in another. What is it he has got on his mind, Alice, do you suppose?"

"On his mind?"

"You have not noticed it?"

She shook her head. "No, Sim."

He looked at her. "What is it that you have on yours, Alice?"

She was scarlet. "On mine? Nothing whatever, Sim."

He was silent a moment. "Yes, I am going tomorrow. I don't know that I am altogether happy about going somehow. I will tell you what I have noticed, Alice. I have only just got the word for it while I have been standing here. Charles gives me the notion of a kind of suppressed excitement about him, a kind of planning something, of having something — a big thing — in view."

She was listening attentively.

He added, "So do you."

She cried immediately, "Sim, you are ridiculous."

As though he dismissed the subject, "Well, well," he said; but she did not speak and he pondered and then returned to it. "You both — is it ridiculous? — give me the idea of being in waiting for something."

She had a paper in her hand and her fingers closed on it causing it to rustle. "Absurd," she said. The word, no more than a whisper, had in it the tone of what is called a strained whisper; and as though she wished to cover that note she cleared her throat: "Charles may be," she said.

He said, "I think Charles is." There was silence. "Look after Charles, Alice," he said.

The paper rustled again. "If you are apprehensive about Charles," her voice was murmur, "If you are apprehensive about Charles, you have not forgotten your promise to come to him if he should be in need of you, Sim?"

"I remember it well." He smiled at her. "I will be waiting for it;" and then he laughed. "All of us waiting for something, that way, eh?"

Waiting for something? Sim left her and when the door was closed upon him she opened the paper — it was a letter — that was in her hand and read again its lines. "Why wait? If, as I well can know, the sight of Charles and of what he has lost through that Jule-devil gives my beloved pain, why wait?"

The hand that held the letter went down to her knee. She just sat there, gazing before her.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROSETTES

Sim left on the morrow and went for a promised night or two to Andrew. Linda, looking adorable in black, had attended the funeral but the circumstances had not availed a talk with her alone. Virtually this was the first time he had seen her since her acute distress of that hurried evening and he wondered as he approached the house how things had gone.

They seemed to have gone well; they seemed — at first — to have gone altogether, to be forgotten, never to have happened. Linda greeted him in radiant spirits and she was in radiant dress. "I can't stick black," were almost her first words to him; and all the characteristic rattle of her spirits came out on a subject led up to by Sim's question — he had no intention of reopening fears that seemed quite dissipated —"Linda, who was that man going out as I came in?"

"Lesson that man was, little Sim boy. How nice you look. I do love seeing you, Sim. Sir Toridd Lesson, as they call him, that man was. What a name!"

Sim said, "I thought I recognised him. You know what we called him out in the war when we read about the jobs and the knighthoods he was pulling off in Government work at home — the 'Orrid Lesson."

Linda laughed gleefully. "He is called that still."

"I believe you," Sim agreed, and also laughed. "Not," he continued, "that he is anything but a mighty good lesson in the way he has got on, mind you. Engineering

contractor he calls his job, doesn't he, or is it contracting engineer? Anyway he contracted to some profit in those days. He has made pots, I suppose?"

"You bet he has!"

"I thought Andrew couldn't stick him at any price?"

"Andrew simply can't. When Andrew ever goes to church and they say 'Here beginneth the first lesson' he gets up and goes out."

Sim laughed. "What is he doing here then?"

"What are you doing here, Inquisitive?"

"Talking to you."

"So was he." Linda jumped up. "Sim, dash 'Orrid Lesson, take me out to tea somewhere. I like being seen with you. Your hideousness sets me off."

Sim agreed. "Right. One thing more about the 'Orrid one though. What was that little red rosette he had on his left arm? I see skits of people with it."

"Been vaccinated, of course."

Sim struck his hand to his forehead in mock heroics. "Ass that I am! Of course that is it — this smallpox scare — those red things have been puzzling me ever since I came to town. There was a scare years back, I remember, with everybody going about with red tape armlets on their sleeves to warn people from jostling against vaccinated arms. I would have jumped to the meaning of red tape. It was the cunning little rosettes that I didn't tumble to."

Linda told him, "That's a Stupendity stunt. Stupendity's have got two windows jim-jam with rosettes, and a huge notice 'England Expects Everybody to do their Duty and be Vaccinated; Stupendity gives a Free Rosette to Shield your arm.'"

Sim laughed. "And everyone that is worn advertises Stupendity's. They are marvels, those people. I wonder if that was Lardy's idea. Charles has been vaccinated,

so had Alice; but not rosetting of course; have you been done, Linda?"

"Likely!"

"Well, I don't see why not. Of course it isn't really bad anywhere except down in Westchurch, near where I am. That is where it started, you know, and there have been three cases near us at Barton. But you never know. I have seen it in India and it is unspeakable when it once gets going. If Stupendity's are frightening people into vaccination up here they are doing a good thing. I think it's a duty. I have been done regularly of course in the service; I think you ought to be, Linda."

Linda made a face at him. "You can think what you like, Mr. Apothecary. But if you think I am going to make my lovely arm into a chopping-block you'd better think again."

Sim said, "My good ugly, you needn't be done on your arm. There is no need to be done where it will show."

"That is all you know," cried Linda. "My dear little Sim boy, when I am in one of my new evening frocks the parts of me that don't show simply aren't talked about, not by nice people."

Sim laughed aloud. "Linda, you are awful; you really are!"

She joined him, impishly, in his laughter; but in the very middle of her own she suddenly was grave, had suddenly the air of one who in the midst of wildest romping suddenly draws out, sits down, has had enough, is weary of it, tired, sick. "Oh, Sim, I know I am," she said, her voice disconsolate as in this change her air had gone; "but when I make you laugh at me like that — oh, Sim!"

A couch was beside her and she dropped on to it, hands lax, frame drooped, one literally withdrawn from play and sick for home.

He was concerned. "Linda, it was just ragging."

She smiled at him. "I know it was. But, Sim ——" She stretched out a hand towards him. "Come and sit by me, Sim, and I will tell you something."

He came to her, taking her hand, and held it while he sat. "Tell me, old girl."

She put his hand to her face and rested her cheek against it. "Dear Sim, strong Sim," she said, and was silent, holding his hand there.

Immediately with her change of mood their scene within the hall that night had come into his mind. "No trouble, Linda. Not ——?"

"Sim, just a pain."

"A pain?"

She took his hand to her heart and pressed it there. "A pain — here, Sim."

"Yes, it is that trouble of the other night," he said. "I thought it gone, you seemed so bright."

"Ah, seemed!" she sighed. "I always do; I always am; I make people, everybody, laugh as I made you laugh just now, Sim, and in the middle of it ——" she made a little gesture with her other hand. "That is what I am going to tell you, Sim;" and suddenly, after silence, she began to tell him.

"Sim, I went the other night to see *Hamlet* on the film. I had never read a line of that Shakespeare stuff since I was at school. Sim, there was a line they showed that went into me"— her disengaged hand held her handkerchief clutched up in it and she struck her fist against her heart —"oh, like *that,* Sim, where my pain is, and was the pain."

Hamlet in its familiar phrases stood up before his mind. "Yes, tell," he said; and wondered which the phrase could be.

"Sim, about some jester; was it Yorick?"

"Yorick, yes."

"Yes, Yorick; about — Sim, this was it — about how often he had set the table in a roar. Do you see, Sim?"

He had been surprised at her selection but dimly he followed. "I see in a way; you have just been telling me — you mean about you making people shout with laughter as just now you made me."

She nodded.

"But, Linda, why pain; how can it pain you?"

"Yorick had failed, was dead."

He smiled. "Linda, you are miles from dead."

"Sim, but failing — with Andrew."

"Linda, that absurd idea of yours — oh, foolish, foolish."

"Oh, Sim, I wish it were!"

"But that quarrel, that little tiff that night when I was here, and you so bright when I came in just now; you don't tell me that that is still between you."

"No, that passed over, Sim."

He put into his voice the cheer that should have been, but was not, in her own. "Well, there you are! You coaxed him round?"

She gave assent.

"I knew you would. I told you so."

She turned to him. "Sim, if you knew how hard it was! Sim, if you knew how harder every time, how oftener the occasion! And then I set the table in a roar, and then I know that next time — and soon a time ——. That is the pain, Sim."

"Imagined pain; imagined; there never will be such a time."

"Yes, when the picture fails. It is just the picture Andrew cares about. I told you that. It isn't me. And, Sim, there is this — I told you I know now that Andrew doesn't really love me — not me myself, the picture only. I know he never did; I know now it always has been just

the picture only. And, Sim, when I look back and see all that, I see as well that I never loved Andrew, not really loved him. Oh, Sim, I love him now."

He would have spoken, protested at her declaration that she had never really loved, but with her cry — a cry it was — of "Sim, I love him now," she suddenly was appealing to him. "Sim, I made you call out to me just now that I am awful. I know I am. But I am not bad, Sim. I do risky things and I say risky things and I am this and that and everything that is light and reckless, but that is because it is just my nature. I *live,* Sim. I live every minute of every hour. Sim, I love living: but I am not bad, Sim."

He took his hand from hers and put his arm about her shoulders: "My dear, my dear, you, bad!"

By motion of her body, a small confiding movement, she seemed to thank his gesture and his words. "I just love living, Sim: but I have been true as true to Andrew; but only loved to live and laugh, and never truly loved Andrew till now; and Sim, this is the pain, this is the pain I have when I just rattle on, and live, and set the table in a roar — that I love Andrew but Andrew does not love me."

A piteous thing to hear! Said as she said it, her voice dim; said by such as she, ever so radiant, now with the hand that squeezed her handkerchief touched to her eyes, touchingly piteous and he was touched. Even if but imagination piteous; and his kindest way, he thought, was to reason with her on an obvious ground.

"Linda, well, let it be so. Don't you see that if it is so there now is not a bit of need for pain in it for you? Look, if you love him now; I know you always have but ——"

She made dissent. "Believe me, Sim."

"Well, let that be. Look, this is clear as day, that

loving him now you never will be giving him a reason for — for getting grumpy — for looking at you as you think he sometimes looks — for wanting only what you call the picture and having to be coaxed to want it. The picture and the coaxing will not be necessary; just you yourself only will be necessary now. Is not that clear as day?"

She did not respond. She sat quite silent.

"As clear as day," he reaffirmed.

To another quarter now her mood seemed changed. A sombre, brooding air was on her. She got up. "Sim, that is easy saying," she said. Her voice was heavy, warning.

"It is easy doing. No need for any picture business."

"Yes, there will be need, Sim."

"What need? Come now?"

"I am too deep in, Sim."

"Deep in what?"

She was silent. Presently she said, "Money — debts."

"Oh, come!" he said. This left him unconcerned. He could not associate debts with the lavish living here. "Oh, come!"

His tone had no response in hers: "Have you got any money, Sim?"

He said lightly, "I have got about ninepence, and my return ticket."

She smiled, but palely, and she drew away and he saw his unconcern not justified: "Old girl, I daresay I could raise a hundred pounds, and jolly glad to."

"Dear Sim!" And then she said, "A hundred!"

She began to tell him of cards and of borrowings. Of bills and of extravagances, principally of losses at play and of advances, from friends, from accommodating dressmakers. When she had finished he was prepared to

be taken above the estimate he formed in his mind but he was in not the least prepared for what she told him.

"But what does it all come to? What is it that you want, Linda?"

She looked at him. "Eight thousand pounds."

"Linda!"

CHAPTER X

THE PURPOSE

"WHAT I am afraid of," Sim was telling Elisabeth, "is that Linda has the plan of getting help, of raising this money, from people who would be only too glad to help her and who ——"

He was with Elisabeth in a small ante-room of the boarding-house where Miss Andiron who "might have had a beautiful house of her own" was "forced to live." Filled with all that was arising within him from the revelation to him that in Kingdom of Heaven in us all lay the direct approach to the truth he sought, he had immense reasons for wishing long evenings with Elisabeth while he remained in town; but this meeting, come on to straight from his interview with Linda, was their first since his arrival and Elisabeth had been telling him that there could be no evenings. She was living at the boarding-house now. Miss Andiron was very ill and she was nursing her. Miss Andiron in her illness was pathetically different (Elisabeth said) from Miss Andiron in her health. "She is so gentle, so grateful; and Sim, apart that she cannot be left, she seems to love to have me by her. You can imagine what that means to me, Sim; what happiness it gives me."

He had reproached her that she was taxing herself too greatly. "I get very tired," she had replied; "but, Sim, the more tired I am the greater happiness I have."

"K.O.H. happiness," he said gravely. He had already told her the first of his discovery. "K.O.H. happiness

because it is K.O.H. kindness that you are doing. Elisabeth, there is proof every way I turn."

"Sim, it is the most wonderful, wonderful thought;" and she had gone on to speak of Miss Andiron's exemplification of it in this her new gentleness and gratitude; and out of that how now, her time so taken up, they could not meet; and thus to ask him where he now was staying —"With Andrew?"

He had said, "Yes, with Andrew;" and on the words had been carried straight to speak to her of Linda's case.

"That is what I am afraid of, Elisabeth, the idea for raising this money that I believe she has on her mind, and it is worrying me badly."

"What idea, Sim?"

"Why, all she is borrowing now to pay her card losses, and the losses themselves that have not been paid, have got to be met. Every dip she takes in those sources is just a dip deeper. But there is another source that would not want to be paid back, I think. There are people, men, in Andrew's world who would jump to the chance of helping Linda and let the debt run till Doomsday. It would not be a loan; it would be, to her — to Andrew's wife — a gift."

"Sim, to an amount like that?"

"To more, I wouldn't be surprised. I don't know much about these things, but I am talking about the people who do huge business deals and they think in amounts that to me are just rows of meaningless figures. Presents to Linda from their point of view would not even be a gift; they would be an investment. The people I mean are the people who want to stand in well with Andrew."

Elisabeth questioned him.

"Why, it is like this," he told her. "I have told you often about how stand-offish Andrew is with people who

want to show him favours. His principle is that a favour accepted means a favour in return and that that is the road to nods, hints, friendly tips about the deals he is concerned in. That is a road that Andrew will not go near and that is why he cold-shoulders half the world. But Linda doesn't. Linda holds out both hands to everybody who is in the swim of things. It has been the cause of trouble between her and Andrew long before now. I have seen signs of it often. I never took them seriously; but lately I see that they have been serious; now, with this trouble that Linda is in, I can see possibilities very much more serious. When I had got my wits again after she told me it was eight thousand pounds she wanted I suggested that if she was afraid of telling Niggs I should do it for her. She was in a panic at once. She said the position was not nearly as bad as she had made me imagine it was. She said, assuring me definitely, that she had 'ways of raising the money.' What they were she would not tell me. But she said a thing that gave me, when I thought of it afterwards, a clue, and that has given me the fears that I have got. A man had been calling on her whom I well can believe is just the very type of man would give his ears for some of the things that Andrew knows. He is a man — Sir Toridd Lesson, you probably have seen his name in the papers — whom Andrew will have nothing to do with except when he has to meet him in business. Well, he had been calling on Linda; and Linda, immediately after she had told me she had ways of raising money, made me promise on no account to tell Andrew that Lesson had been there."

Sim had given that promise, lightly enough at the moment —"Of course I won't, old girl"— but the possibilities that resided in the coincidence had come to him, as he had said, afterwards, and speaking of them now to Elisabeth they developed anew as he told them.

Elisabeth's difficulty was the amount involved. Eight thousand pounds; it seemed impossible to her that it could be worth any one's while to hand about such sums or even considerable part of them — as gifts.

"But you are like I am, Elisabeth," Sim said. "You do not realise what figures these big people think in. Andrew when we were up to hear the Will read was all concern to get to his office over a Staverton deal that is now going through. He told me just a thing or two about it while Charles was speaking to the bank manager before the Will was opened. It was some syndicate's scheme for opening up an iron ore deposit in Brazil somewhere. There is a shipping port on the coast to be constructed, a railway to be laid between the mines and the port, and all the works connected with the two. Staverton is tendering. I asked Andrew casually — just to pass the time — what roughly was the figure of such a tender; whatever do you think?"

Elisabeth made the gesture of one quite ignorant. "A million — no, not as much as that."

Sim smiled. "Almost my own exact words when Andrew asked me to guess. Andrew didn't smile. He never does. He just said dryly: 'Nearer sixty millions.'"

"It is incredible!"

"It is true. Elisabeth, don't you see that, supposing Lesson were interested in this affair — he almost certainly is — eight thousand pounds, twice eight thousand, would be as nothing to getting put in the way of a share in the huge contracts that will go out on a scheme like that?"

She saw more clearly now and so — by this explaining to her — did he. "I wish to goodness," he presently was saying, "that I had had the courage to say something to Linda."

"But, dear, you did not think about all this till after you had left her."

"Not so strongly as I have since, not about the coincidence of Lesson, nor, till this very moment, the coincidence of Lesson and this new great deal of Staverton's; but it was in my mind. I did not like her mysterious suggestion of having ways of getting the money; it was in my mind to say something to her and I just did not like to." He paused. He said slowly: "I have precious little courage in matters like that, I find."

Elisabeth would not have that. "Sim, if you think that you ought to give her a word of warning you will. You have heaps of courage where your duty lies, Sim."

He smiled at her. "If I had everything that I have in your eyes, Elisabeth! But I will speak to Linda. My mind is made up to that this moment, just through talking to you. Everything comes plain and easy when I talk to you, Elisabeth. And, Elisabeth, it was not about Linda that I came to talk."

"No, we just got on to poor Linda's trouble somehow. It was about that thought, that discovery of yours, Sim, that we were talking — Kingdom of Heaven."

He said, "But, Elisabeth, a thing I said just now has to do with that; I mean when I said that I find I have precious little courage, moral courage, when it comes to the point. Elisabeth, I have a feeling that I am going to want courage — heaps."

"Tell me, Sim."

He was silent a few moments, looking deeply before him. "I shall go back tomorrow morning, then," he then said; "and I have a feeling about that too. I have a feeling, Elisabeth, that I shall not be at Barton End much longer."

"Sim, your Purpose?"

He very slowly nodded. "Something is quickening

within me, Elisabeth. That is the feeling I have. Something is quickening and I have a kind of instinct that courage will be called for in it and that leaving Barton End will be called for in it."

"Sim! Sim, it is out of that Kingdom of Heaven; I am sure of it."

Happy at her perception, he smiled at her. "Yes, it is that; but I have not told you the half of it, Elisabeth. I only have told you what those Englands told to me — K.O.H. kindness — the little things that are Kingdom of Heaven kindness. That same day I came up for Old Gand's death. It was there, by his bed that night, that something happened to me, that the thing that is quickening in me began. I have not told you that."

He began to tell her. He told her of his thought — "What peace!" beside that tranquil sanctuary upon the bed; and of its merging into question —"What peace? Sanctuary of what sublimity of peace was this?"; then of the answer —"Elisabeth, like a live thing quickening within me"— that suddenly had filled him: the peace of the Kingdom of Heaven. He told her of how, causing him to tingle as with the rush of sudden and glorious news, that answer joined with that sharp moment when, riding from the Englands, he had struck his hand upon his knee in swift perception that here, in the spirit of that Kingdom, was glimpse behind the mystery of what religion was. He told her then of how, delving among these revelations through the night, his mind had thrown up proof on proof —"for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven"; "Thy Kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in heaven"— proof in the words of Christ himself that here indeed the sought-for knowledge lay; here, here, the faith a man could understand — and live — and follow.

He said: "Elisabeth, the Kingdom of Heaven in us all — in you, in me, in everyone! The more I think of

it, Elisabeth, the surer seem my feet to go towards it. 'Suffer the little children to come unto me for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.' Christ did not mean that children are Heaven's only people; He meant, I feel it, that in the loveliness of children stands plain for us to see the spirit of that Kingdom established in us all at birth. Look at those people who are very fond of children and whom all children take to; my mother, far more than anyone I have ever known, was such a one; she never could pass a baby in the street but she must stop and talk to it. It is, it only can be, that those people have kept that Kingdom preserved within them and that automatically — like calling unto like — it floods out of them when in children's faces they see realms of their own Kingdom shining before them. Yes, like calling unto like; there is a pass-word, a fellowship, between all such; they open their gates to one another — the pass-word and the fellowship and the portals of the spirit of the Kingdom of Heaven. 'Thy Kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in Heaven.' What does it mean but that that Kingdom is already here, set in each one of us, needing only to be known to be realised?"

Her voice when she then spoke was whisper, that tense utterance of one who catches and gives back a thought implied, not toned; "Sim — needing only to be known to be realised!"

He said: "Elisabeth, what did I say just now of feeling need for courage, of feeling that a change is coming to me? That very next day those feelings came. I looked at Charles, coming up in the train with him to hear the Will, and saw him, that poor Charles, haggard in trouble sitting there, and wanted to tell things like this to him and did not like to, had not the courage. When I felt that, then it was that I began to have the feeling that courage was to be called upon in me; when,

while I think of Kingdom of Heaven in us all needing only to be known to be realised, my mind turns to Old Ballard's, somehow I do not seem to see Old Ballard's — and then the feeling that I am not going to be much longer there."

She was gazing at him, her lips still parted in that whispered echo of his words, now gathering within her eyes that self-same haze of following a half-caught suggestion that had been in them on the night he turned disconsolately from her down the steps in Harley Street. She put a quick hand to him and she spoke, and in her gesture and her note the selfsame note and gesture were of her strange cry that night "Of God."

She said: "Sim, 'only needing to be known to be realised?' Oh, Sim, your Purpose — make it known!"

He said very deeply: "I have thought of that."

They were alone in that room. Profoundly moved, she gave herself into his arms. He held her. She could feel the quiver in him of some great emotion. He said, "Knowledge — a little more, a little more; and courage, courage!"

"Sim, Sim!"

CHAPTER XI

THE GAME

KNOWLEDGE, a little more — and courage, courage. When he was back at Barton End, again within the quiet of that habitation where first since his disturbances his physical part had found settlement, again within the range of these associations where first upon his spiritual part a light had come, he had the daily feeling of approach with each succeeding day towards that final knowledge which should show him where he was to go. Something was quickening in him, he had told Elisabeth; and strongly, strangely, daily, he now could feel its pulse.

There is an experience, lively in childhood, rare as years advance, of awakening in the morning with a feeling of expectation. The senses, sprung out from slumber, seem to hover for a moment, out of communication, not linked up; the mind, the conscious waiting ego, half frames the question "What — ?" There suddenly is juncture — floods through the pulses surge of thoughts on which the eyes last night were closed, causing the leap to full awakedness, catching the half-spoken question and bursting it into happy cry: "It is today! The day has come!"

It was to such that daily Sim aroused, and not in rising only had that tingling catch and leap. Through all of every day expectancy was his. Kingdom of heaven; a positive faith that would satisfy! "I have it, I have it!" his heart would sing. Kingdom of heaven; some truth a man can understand! "It is coming to me, it is coming to me!" his heart would cry; and he would dwell

upon the opening to him of the presence of that Kingdom, not remotely placed in some infinitude beyond the grasp of human mind, but here, upon this earth, within the being of every man that breathed; and dwelling on it he would feel that opening open wider, wide and yet more wide.

Strange that beneath his very roof were two whose faces, as whose lives, were illustrations straight to his hand of the enshrinement in each human soul of Heaven's Kingdom! Old Yeoman and his sister, what was the tranquil beauty of their faces, what their simple happiness, what the old man's thought for others in those seats of his for weary travellers, what his sister's gentle ways, what their fond and mutual love but the enlargement in them of that Kingdom set in every heart? Old Yeoman was working now on the completion of his fourth seat; Sim would help him and as he helped him would watch his face and see the Kingdom there. "Come unto me all ye that weary and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Were not those kind and patient fingers, out of the Kingdom whence they had their earnest, carving an earthly application of the text: "Rest, passer-by, then cheerly on: peace on thy habitation, passer-by?"

He was working with old Yeoman, thinking of how beneath his roof were these two testimonies to his belief, when the post brought him news of another person that his roof should house.

Linda — the letter from her in his hand informed him — was coming to him, that same day.

She gave no reason; he guessed the reason.

In the afternoon he went to meet her; he had guessed aright; trouble, acute, with Andrew.

The night that he left Elisabeth to come again to Barton on the morrow he had had no chance to carry out his

resolve to dare the great offence that he might give to Linda by speaking to her warningly of taking help whence Andrew against mere friendship set his face. As things fell out he had no moment alone with her that night, nor, as they chanced again, in the morning when he left. It did not greatly matter, he told himself. The day was Thursday. On the Saturday she was coming with Andrew and Lord Staverton to Staverton Park. He would have ample opportunity then. The week-end came, and Staverton and guests, and Andrew. Linda did not come. He questioned Andrew. Andrew said solely, "Linda has not come"—no more; and by his brevity told much.

Now Linda come as it were to take a refuge; the thing looked bad.

But was it bad? Just as she had been the very sprite of liveliness, all trouble seemingly at end, when he had remet her after the disclosures in the hall, so now, despite the patent ominousness of her absence from the week-end party and of this her strange descent upon him, the very sprite of liveliness again. Could matters be bad? There had been, he gathered, another scene, "a fiend's own scene" in Linda's words the minute after he had met her; but she used the words on her liveliest note; it was impossible to get facts out of her; all her manner at the moment of her arrival in the train defied belief that the trouble could be serious.

When he had greeted her as she alighted, and while a porter got her things, "You and Niggs?" he questioned. "Oh, don't ask!" she said and made a gesture mockingly calamitous.

That, and "a fiend's own scene", was as far as she would go. She was in gayest spirits; she seemed to be filled only with a sense of being escaped on a wild lark and with a schoolboy's glee and irresponsibility in the enjoyment of it. "Sim"—they were in the cab leaving

the station —" if you knew how I am going to love this holiday with you and how I am loving it already! This funny old Noah's Ark fly alone is worth the journey. I believe I haven't been in a fly like this since our children's party days at home." And it was like a child enjoying a treat in a cab-drive that she behaved; everything was pointed at; everything was questioned. " What's that? Who's that? " was in her every sentence; and each of his replies, not yet quite pitched, for he was far from being prepared for it, to her own rattle, was bantered back at him.

When they were out of the town, " Well, come on now, Sim, you are not telling me anything. What is that place on the hill over there? "

He gave way, very gladly, to her mood. Impossible that anything could be wrong. " Linda, you are just having a game with me, querying everything you see like this. You must have driven this road scores of times going to Staverton. What do you do, sleep all the time? "

" Just where you make a *mighty* mistake," cried Linda, " for I have never got out at Barton Magna in my life before. Staverton Halt is where the grown-ups get out, little boy."

" Ah, I had forgotten. It is all new to you, this, of course."

" Absolutely fresh from the cow and I am losing it all because for a guide a village idiot would beat you. Come on, tell me, poor little idiot boy,— that place over there? It is hideous enough. Is it a prison or is it that wonderful cottage of his that Major Simon Paris is always gassing about? "

Sim laughed. " You are nearer with your prison shot, ugly lady. That's the county isolation hospital, and pretty full at present, m'am. Linda, have you been vaccinated yet? "

"Not me."

"'Not I,' as B. C. D. would pull out his Bodyguard grammar and tell you. Well, you ought to have been, Linda; especially coming down here. Andrew ought to put a collar and chain on you and drag you off to be done."

"Oh, Andrew!" she cried. "Next time you see Andrew it will be down on his benders and offering me a bit of sugar to come back into the cage again; tears streaming down his face; you see!"

She clapped her hands. She was radiant.

"Linda, seriously, what is the game?"

She caught his arm and snuggled against him. She stretched out her legs and clapped together her dainty shoes. "Oh, wouldn't he like to know, you know; oh, wouldn't he like to know!"

"Well, he certainly would. He insists. What is at the bottom of this bolt down here? Out with it, Linda."

Animatedly she told him. Done out of her rattle and slang, it was, simply, that Andrew had been at his blackest and most stern, that she had tried to coax him round and had failed, that she suddenly had conceived the brilliant notion of leaving him for a bit, that she knew he would be eating his heart out for her the moment she had gone, that when he saw her again he would be at her feet — and that here she was!

She stretched out and clapped her shoes together again: "Here I be, fiddle-de-dee! Here I be, fiddle-de-dee."

Could this be the same creature who, almost in tears, had spoken to him of the bitterness of having to employ that very coaxing —"the picture"— and of how hard and harder to achieve was that same tragic coaxing's success? He never had seen her in higher spirits; he never had seen her, looking at her, he thought, looking more radiantly lovely. Well he could believe — putting away

all that had passed at her house as she most obviously had put it away — well he could believe, now hearing her and now looking at her, that she was right; that Andrew, as the saying was, would be all over her when he recovered her again; and he told her so:

"Ugly though you are, I believe you are right. Does Niggs know you are here?"

"Rather! You bet I told him; I *want* that sugar he will soon be offering me. Oh, yes, he knows. He will come plunging down after me this very night, I shouldn't be surprised."

She was wrong there (not that it was seriously expected). Andrew did not come plunging down that night, nor in any day of those that immediately followed, nor did he write; but no qualms were given Linda by his silence; she was certain of her plan. "The next time he sees me! The next time he sees me!" She was singing all her days at Old Ballard's and that was the burthen of her song.

Difficult indeed to believe that this gleeful, mischievous sprite was the same woman, who, suddenly betraying another self, had cried, "Sim, there are times when I catch Andrew looking at me and then —"; the same who said, "And then I set the table in a roar and then —"; the same who had revealed, "Sim, I love Andrew, but Andrew doesn't love me." But it was the same woman. He was given just one glimpse of it. To the full circumstances of all that she had told him that evening in the hall, that afternoon in Mayfair Street, she never again referred, and he, feeling that the lead should come from her, alike abstained. But that what she then had told was that on which was poised her radiancy in this her plot down here came in one sudden, swiftly come and swiftly gone, withdrawal of the airy wings that hid it. She was at her liveliest one night, mocking at the height

of her pantomimic ways Andrew's ecstasies when he should see her again, and Sim had exclaimed, "Linda, you are the limit, you really are!" when, on a change startling in its abruptness, she came swiftly to him from where she stood posturing and cast herself on her knees beside his chair: "Oh, but dear little Sim boy, don't think I am not in earnest; don't think, as I asked you not to once before, that I am all, all fun and rattle, Sim. Sim, I am staking everything on that when Andrew sees me next he will be longing, longing for me. And when he is, it is fresh I am going to start, Sim. Andrew is going to idolize me then and I am going to be his true — Sim, his worthy — idol ever, ever more. I am only wild, only excited now, because I am so certain that when next he sees me he will adore me. He will, Sim, won't he? Tell me he will; tell me, Sim!"

He put his hand on her forehead and smoothed back her lovely hair, more soft than down, more bright than gold. Beneath the brownness of his hand her skin gleamed white as milk, beneath the pleading of her mood her eyes and lips touched with new beauty the beauty of her face. He thought that such an exquisite creation could not be otherwhere in all the world. "Linda, next time he sees you he will want to worship you," he said.

She put her head down on her folded hands crossed on his chair's arm: "Oh, the next time!" he heard her murmur.

He always remembered that moment, her incomparable loveliness in it, her emotion in, as it were, her knowledge of her incomparable loveliness and all that it would mean to her.

That he should remember it events now were marshalling as soldiers flocking from their tents and falling into line; and they recalled to him when, marshalled, they

advanced and struck, not that moment only but the whole circumstances of that day which it had closed.

She had said in the morning that she was going up to Staverton Park and would take lunch there. Lady "Tony" had a houseparty and she would spend the day there, she said. Left to himself, he rode over to the Englands, lunched there, and, telling of Linda's stay with him, had extracted from him a promise that he would bring her over. (Extraction was necessary to get the undertaking from him: he was a little doubtful of Linda's reaction to the England air.) Returning, he came by Staverton and thought to call to see if Linda had yet left. The servant told him Linda was not there—"No, not to lunch, Sir. Mrs. Paris has not called here today at all."

He rode home quickly. It had begun to rain and he was wet before he made Old Ballard's. Linda, not there, was much the more wet when, an hour later, she turned up.

"Linda, you are soaked," he told her. "Where have you been?"

She was about to speak but his words were running on. "You never went to Staverton after all," he said. "I called there for you just before tea."

He did not notice it then, but, when the events had struck, rehearsing them, could recall that she appeared in smallest degree taken aback.

All that at the time he saw was that she turned away and swished the raindrops from her felt hat. "*Look* at the wet! Why, no, I went a tramp, miles. I had the sudden idea that I would. You go tramping, why shouldn't I? It is fun. I loved it!"

"Where?"

She did not know; could not tell him; had just tramped. Lunched at a Trust House somewhere — at Shifney, she thought; got caught in the rain coming back and took

shelter in a cottage; stuck it till it was certain she would be there for the night if she waited for the rain to stop; came on in the rain; loved it; was *ravenous*—"Tea! Tea!" and she fastened upon the tea-table and ravenous appeared to be — also, beyond even her ordinary measure, animated and excited. Sim commanded her to get off her soaking things. No, no! it was lovely here by the fire; she was steaming like a tea-kettle and she loved to see herself steam and there still was tea in the tea-pot and cake on the plate and she was not going to move until the whole of it was inside her.

She moved nevertheless throughout her meal, dancing and playing-acting about, cake in one hand, cup in the other. She was wildly excited. She might have been a boy who had just passed an examination; she reminded Sim precisely of his own desire to jump out of his skin or stand on the table and yell when his Sandhurst success came out. She might have been one suddenly discharged from a load of care; she reminded Sim precisely of his own wild exultation when in his early subaltern days an amazing birthday cheque from an almost unheard-of Godparent had suddenly cleared some wickedly pressing debts. He got her off to a bath and a change at last because he caught her out in a shiver; but he could hear her singing during her operations and she was as mad as ever when she reappeared and it was in the gay pantomiming of Andrew's ecstasies when he next should see her, and in that deep but happy cry of hers, her head on her hands, "Oh, the next time!" that the evening ended.

Of her all-day tramp she would say nothing. Her exultant mood made her snap up any opportunity of teasing mischief and to this mood she suited all Sim's questions (adroitly, as he afterwards reflected), pretending that she was delighted to have him make a mystery out of it and refusing him, because he had made it a mystery,

one single answer. "Well, suppose you tell me first what *you* have been doing all day," was another counter to his questions; and when he told her that he had visited the Englands, and when she had extracted from him (extraction again the necessary operation) that they had asked him to bring her over, enthusiastic, she insisted that they would visit there on the morrow. "We will walk," she declared. "You will see then what a walker I am" and they were back again on the subject of her tramp; and the most she now would say, teasing him, was that it was the "most luckiest" walk she ever had had in her life: "The luckiest, luckiest, ever — oh, wouldn't he like to know, you know; oh, *wouldn't* he like to know!"

In the morning the high spirits were equally within her.

Now her excitement was looking out for the postman — there would be a letter from Andrew she was sure, she said in explanation, a wail of longing for her. She dashed out to meet the postman when he came in sight and then dashed in again for a pencil. There was no letter from Andrew, but there was a letter expressed to her though only arrived in the common delivery for which she had to sign. "An express letter!" she cried, waving it. "Didn't I say my walk was going to bring me luck!"

He laughed, and then stated the hope that its not coming earlier did not matter, and that gave her the excuse (he afterwards remembered) for making a mystery of it and refusing to tell him what the letter was. Her fun now was in setting him to guess and at every guess declaring it to be much, much more marvellous than that; and off and on she kept this up, her glee at its highest, until in the afternoon they went over to tea at the Englands'. She did the walk handsomely; Sim admitted that to her; but during tea, glancing at her, he thought her looking a little fagged and rain coming on settled the question, there could be no idea of walking back. The

Englands' car was out of action. Sim, acting on a bright, but indeed the only possible idea, telephoned the situation to Staverton Park and, nothing else being available, was forced to accept the reply. The house-party, he was informed, were away on an excursion in all the cars and not returning till ten or eleven; immediately a car was in it should be sent over. This meant staying on for dinner. The Englands were delighted; Linda was delighted. But dinner and the late coming of the car meant staying also for the family prayers; and Sim at thought of the conjunction of Linda, especially in her present high mood, and of family prayers, was less delighted than dubious; he thought of the comments — the lively comments — he was likely to hear from her on the drive home and he did not relish the thought.

Dinner came, the family prayers came (he gave her no warning of them), the car came. On the drive back Linda's comment was a single word.

She said nothing at all until two miles or more had been driven, nor he; he was wondering what she would say and a little dreading it. Then suddenly she inquired abruptly: "Did you know they were going to have family prayers, Sim?"

"Yes, I knew that. What about it, Linda?"

"Rum," said Linda.

It was her sole word on that or on any other subject until Old Ballard's was reached, when, with few words, admitting fatigue, she went to bed. But on the morrow, and in circumstances and with sentiment that Sim found much more surprising than any he had imagined, she referred again to the subject. It was at Staverton Park. He had taken her up there to tea; himself was staying only half an hour because he had promised old Yeoman his help in the great event of carting the fourth seat to the fourth hill. Tables were set for cards as he was

going and, engaged with other company, he went across to Linda's four as he was leaving and told her that he was off. The hand had just been played; it appeared that Linda had not played her cards as she might and her table, debating the hand, was telling her so. A woman at another table caught the remarks. "Well, you can't expect poor Linda to be in her best form," she called across the room. "You know where the car went for her last night — at those Englands'. They say family prayers there with the servants every night, all down on their benders with their arms round one another's necks. Enough to put any one off their form."

There was laughter; and the speaker, encouraged, went on: "Yes, rather. Linda, do tell us, did you go down on your benders and do the holy holy too?"

Linda turned about in her chair, quick, as one stung.

"Yes, I did. Do you mind?"

Her tone caused the lady slightly to flush. "Not a bit, if you don't. I'd love to have seen you. Do they all pray in turn? Did you have to speak?"

Linda put her hand on the back of her chair the better to face towards her questioner. "No, but I will speak now, to you," she cried. Her face was white, her voice passionate. "And it is like a fishwife I am going to speak to you. Shut your mouth, I am going to say. Shut your mouth, because what you are saying with it ought to make you and any of us sick and ashamed that we couldn't do what you are sneering at if we tried. If I had kids which, thank God for their sakes, I haven't, I wish to God I might be capable, which I never could be, of bringing them up just like that. I am this, that and the other but I know what is good even if I can't do it and even if I don't want to do it. But I don't laugh at it; and if you want to laugh at it go into some sink of your own and laugh — not where I am."

She stopped and she remained glaring, breathing hard, and the silence was embarrassing.

Lady Millicent broke it. "Oh, let's get on with the game. What *are* you two jabbering about? Let's get on and forget it."

No reference was made by Linda to the scene when she came back in the evening. Sim all day had had it in his mind — another, and to him a very moving revelation of other sides within this lovely, lightsome creature. He began to speak of it —"Linda, I did like the way you turned on that woman this afternoon "— but she somehow turned the subject and he noticed her something out of sorts and not inclined to talk and he let her be. All the evening she was quiet, not very well her manner suggested; and she went to bed early and in the days that followed he noticed that her quietness continued, and, contrasted with the extra rattle of the beginning of her stay, contrasted sharply and was strange, he thought. She felt out of sorts, she now admitted, and she sat about rather listlessly, not up for exercise, not keen to talk, far from her usual glittering self. Sim on the day after her arrival had tried to carry out his intention of sounding her on the danger of (in the tactful way he began it to her) encouraging the people Andrew discouraged, but her riotously gay spirits then had blown the thing away before ever it had chance of settling. The riotous spirits now were gone and he had better chance and one day took it. "Oh, that's all right, old boy," her only comment was, made with the something weary air that strangely now was hers. "That's all right, old boy, I know what you mean." She sat silent and he thought the thing dismissed, and, for the time being, let it be dismissed. But she had not dismissed it. She had been thinking of it. She spoke again and spoke now, if still a shade wearily, with a soft happiness that touched him happily to hear.

"Sim, dear, you have no need ever to trouble about that kind of thing or about me any more. I am going to be ever so different when I go back to Andrew and Andrew ever so different with me. Everything is going to be different when Andrew sees me again."

She was sitting with him in the afternoon as she spoke. She smiled with, he knew, all that was meant to her in that thought of when Andrew should see her again; and she laid back her head on her chair and had the smile lingering on her face. But she closed her eyes as she lay back, a thing never known in her by broad daylight, and the smile faded to a slight drooping of the lips, equally unknown; and Sim watched her a little anxiously. She had been doing nothing for some days, but she looked fagged. He would not worry her.

Himself, it happened, was to be worried on this same matter of encouraging Andrew's disencouraged by an event that fell upon the afternoon which stood two days before the day fixed for the tremendous occasion of her return to Andrew and for the ravishment of him, deprived of her so long, betraying hunger now in letters that now came daily, that her return in all her beauty was to encompass. Riding abroad that afternoon Sim had been near Chesney Towers and had met Stupendity guests, also riding. Lardy Quinnet was the only one — there were four — known to him and in introducing them one, but Sim had recognised him at once, was presented as Sir Toridd Lesson.

"Your first time in this part of the world?", Sim asked him, exchanging courtesies.

"My first," agreed Sir Toridd, "right here, as they taught me to say in the States. I know the neighbourhood. I was over at Shifney a fortnight ago."

He was a very big man, heavy faced, massively thewed. The horse he bestrode did not look up to his weight, and

Sim was glad for it that the party were only hacking; something much on the weight-carrying side, he reflected, would be wanted to take Sir Toridd in the hunting-field.

"Ah, staying with people?" he questioned politely.

"No, only the night at the local pub. I'd run in on my car and she broke down. Linda Paris still with you?"

Entirely unexpected, the question caused Sim a start; worded as it was, it caused him a sharp annoyance. The start: how on earth did this objectionable man know Linda was here? The sharp annoyance: what infernal right had he to "Linda Paris" her?

The start was but transient; anyone at the Towers might have told Sir Toridd. The sharp annoyance was a deeper thing; everyone in Linda's circle called Andrew's wife Linda Paris; but that this chap — this publican-looking heavy-weight — this notorious profiteer — this outsider black-listed of Andrew —; and Sim put into his voice the stigmatisations that thus were aroused in him.

"My sister-in-law, Mrs. Paris, is with me, yes," he said coldly, and his look partnered the steel with which his tone was shod.

It was one of Sir Toridd Lesson's chief assets on the road of success that he not only never felt a snub or a reproof but that he did not recognise them when he heard them.

"Ah, I'll likely look in and pay my respects while I'm here," he said jovially.

Sim nudged Ethelred with his knees and turned away.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHADOW

LINDA was lying down on the couch before the fire in the sitting-room when he returned. The 'Orrid Lesson was hotly, and a little disturbingly, in his mind when he entered the room and he would have delivered himself of him immediately but for Linda's position, lying there, and the suggestion of her position.

She said drowsily, "Hullo, old boy."

Drowsily? No, wearily. "Been having a doss?" were the words on his tongue, but he did not speak them. Drowsy he first had thought her tone; he looked at her and weary was the word he substituted for it. He went beside her. "Linda, you sound ill, you look ill."

Her eyes were closed. She opened those most lovely eyes of hers and smiled at him her lovely smile — but that smile's ghost, a pale thing, no radiance now.

"I am all right, old boy," she said.

She closed her eyes again.

"Linda, you are not. You have been looking rotten these last days. Nothing up with you, is there, old girl?"

She murmured, "Quite all right, dear little Sim."

"It is not, Linda. You have been frightfully listless a long time; I have noticed it, so has Margaret Yeoman. You have not been out for days."

Still with her eyes shut she stretched up a hand to him. "Quite all right, little Sim boy."

But her touch — that white, soft and lovely hand — worsened his uneasiness.

"Linda, your hand is simply burning; and your face, you are flushed, Linda."

The murmur, "Just the fire, Sim."

He touched her lovely face. "It is not the fire. Linda, you are feverish."

He adjusted the cushions beneath her lovely golden head and looked down upon her, much troubled. "You are feverish, Linda. I think I will get the doctor to you."

Her murmur: "Kind little Sim boy! There is not the least reason, old boy. I've a beast of a head, that is all; right as rain tomorrow."

He did not like it.

To rally her he said brightly, "By jove, you will have to be. The day after you are for Andrew, remember; you have got to be your best for that."

It did rally her. She opened her eyes wide and she smiled almost, not quite, the radiant smile. "Oh, haven't I and oh, won't I be! Oh, Sim, when Andrew sees me again ——"

Her lids closed again, her lips returned again to droop. But she murmured, deeply, happily, "Oh, won't he love me just!" and happily her voice went fading out, "Andrew . . . happy . . . happy!"

But still he did not like it. He stood perturbed.

She would not hear of the doctor; she only wanted just to lie still and quiet; and he felt he could not badger her and let her be: to mention the obnoxious Lesson's intended visit, and the matters cognate to Lesson, certainly was not to be thought of. She would have no dinner; but she insisted he must eat; but he, with her lying there like that, no more than toyed with food: discomforting for anyone to be as out of sorts as patently was she; with radiant, lovely Linda it sheerly was a pain to see her thus.

He asked her once, "Pain, old girl?" She had said she felt a little sick, and appendicitis was in his mind. "Pain, old girl?"

"Only my back, Sim. My back hurts."

" Tummy pain? "

" Only my back, Sim; my back and my head."

The meal was cleared. He tried to read. She seemed to doze.

" Lovely! " she murmured.

He asked her, " Old girl, eh? "

But she seemed to be talking in her sleep; and presently again: " Lovely . . . am I not lovely . . . Andrew? "

And then: " Andrew . . . Andrew . . . "

And then: " Am I not lovely . . . Andrew? "

He had a sudden whelming sense when he heard that.

About ten she suddenly sat up. " I'm going upstairs a minute, old boy," she said: and refusing help she went.

She was a long time away. When she appeared again she came to the couch and sat down, rather suddenly, but did not lie down, remained upright.

" Sim, I've been sick."

" Sick! "

She nodded: " Oh, sick as a dog! "

She shuddered.

When he had spoken, expressing his concern, alarm, " Rum," she said; " I've not been sick since I was a kid." She shuddered again. " It is frightening, being sick, Sim."

Sim said, " It frightens me, horribly. Sure the tummy is all right? "

" Only my back, Sim; my back and my head."

She lay down. " Don't fuss me, old boy."

The next thing was that she would go to bed. In the morning, she promised, she would see the doctor, if no better; and because she urged him so —" Don't fuss me, old boy; don't fuss me, Sim "— he let it go at that and she went. He saw her to her room and into it and did one or two little things for her. She would not have Margaret Yeoman. She just wanted, she said, to drop

off her things and fall into bed. "I'm rather rotten, Sim." He went in again when he knew she was in bed. She was lying in a face-down attitude, her neck, her lovely head, a golden, gleaming thing upon the pillow beneath the candle that he held. "I'm better now. I am thinking of Andrew and when he sees me." Her last words were the same, "I am thinking of when Andrew sees me, Sim."

The next thing was that in the night he awoke, their rooms adjoined, to hear her calling him, "Sim . . . Sim . . ."

A most piteous and a most dreadful sound, filling him with fear, "Sim . . . Sim . . . Oh, Sim."

He struck a light and immediately was in to her. The bed, as the candle steadied from his quick entrance and revealed it, was in utter disarray. The shocking disorder of a fevered sleeper's bed was here; and on the bed, a single glance sufficed and shocked him, one by a fever terribly consumed.

"Linda!"

"Oh, Sim, I am ghastly ill."

She was lying on her back, her elbows outwards, her hands pathetically upon her breast as though they tried to soothe, or to point out, the poor, racked frame that lay beneath them. Only her night-dress covered her; all else was thrown aside.

"My poor, poor girl."

"Oh, Sim."

He stooped above her and as the candle's light came full upon her face he had a new and terrible dismay.

"Linda!"

An awful thought was in his mind; his tone, hushed, hoarse, expressed his fear.

"Oh, Sim. . . . What has happened to me, Sim?"

Her night dress, open at the throat, slightly revealed

her breast. He put his hand to it and drew it further down. Spottings in angry, scarlet flush were there; among them small, deep purple spots.

"Linda! Good God!"

Dumbed by his shock, his cry was scarcely uttered — her name but whispered; "Good God!" but made beneath his breath.

"Oh, Sim, what has happened to me?"

He dared not say. He set down the candle. "I think I had best go straight for the doctor. You are awfully fevered, poor dear old girl. That will be best, to go straight for him."

He began to arrange the bedclothes. "I will make you nice and comfy first."

Arranging, patting, comforting, he gave her cheering and endearing words. "Now we are getting more like it. There: how is that, and that? My poor, poor Linda. Let's give this nighty a pull. I bet that is better, eh? Fancy me making your bed like this and you in it, too!"

"Oh, Sim; I feel so ghastly ill."

"My dear old girl! Dear, poor Linda. Now these pillows, eh?"

"My head, Sim. . . . Oh, Sim, my head!"

"Poorest, dearest, I am just agonized to see you down like this. What about some eau-de-cologne for the poor head? Got any? I bet you have. Look at her dressing table just stuffed with paints and powders!"

He took up some scent and a handkerchief and bathed her forehead and her lovely face, so deeply scarlet now, so hot, so dry, beneath his hand.

"Lovely, isn't it?"

"Kind little Sim boy."

He felt emotion's rush behind his throat.

"Now, how for a drink before I go?"

"Sim, what is it that I have got?"

He dared not say his fear. "Oh, come, let the doctor have a shot at it; he will soon tell us and put it right whatever it is. How for that drink? That lemonade downstairs? I will get it."

He put his arm about her while she drank. This soft and lovely body that he held; this golden, gleaming head against his arm; these soft and lovely hands upon his own; those ever laughing lovely lips against the glass; this radiant, witching spirit that loved Andrew and that banked upon the loveliness that clothed it to win back Andrew's love; if this she had was what he feared. . . .

His heart made prayer.

She felt the tenderness which, of his thoughts, was in his holding of her, in his gentle laying of her down and settling her to rest:

"Kind little Sim boy!"

He felt again that rush behind his throat.

Soon he was outside and making for the doctor.

He knew the doctor well and liked him; and the doctor's voice, immediately on his recognition of Sim, standing below there at the door in the darkness, changed from the short and irritated "Well? What is it? Who is there?" with which his head had first appeared from the window, to "What, Paris? What's up, old man? What is wrong?"

"It is my sister-in-law, Doctor," Sim said. "She is in a frightful fever. She looks to me mighty bad. She's ——"

"I will let you in," the doctor said, and disappeared.

When they were together Sim told him. The doctor made no comment but his manner did. "Come into the surgery while I get a thing or two."

Sim watched him at his shelves, then spoke. "Do you think from what I have told you that it is this — smallpox?"

The doctor said: "From what you have told me I should say there is not a doubt about it."

Sim smote his right fist three times softly and very slowly into his other palm. "God, God, God!"

The doctor, ready now, observed the slow, expressive action, almost could hear the silent invocation. "Bit of a tragedy," he said sympathetically.

Sim said: "It is the whole of a tragedy — an unspeakable one."

As they walked he asked, hesitatingly, fearing the answer, "Does it mark much — always?"

"Oh, not necessarily, not necessarily always. It has been only a mild type down here, you know. Oh, I have seen cases where there is scarcely a ——. She has been vaccinated, of course?"

Clearly Sim saw the radiant, lovely picture, clearly heard the radiant, laughing voice, "My dear little Sim boy, if you saw me in one of my evening frocks you'd know there isn't an inch ——"

"I believe she has not been," he said.

"Um," said the doctor and said no more; and clearly to Sim there came that happy murmur in her sleep: "Lovely . . . am I not lovely, Andrew?"

He clenched his teeth.

When they were come to the house and were without her door, "I will come in with you?" he inquired.

"No reason why you shouldn't," the doctor said. "You have been with her all the time; well, best wait a moment while I have a look, perhaps."

He went in.

Through the closed door Sim heard murmur of his voice, questioning, commenting; replies he could not hear. Then silence, then the doctor's tone, then with a dreadful clearness a most dreadful cry, a lamentable wail, from Linda's voice:

"Oh, not that, not that! Oh, no, no, no, not that!"

His heart was wrung.

He went in. Her face was covered with her hands — not heel of palm to chin, fingers on eyes, as is the common way; her arms were crossed upon her face, her wrists at centre, her fingers coming down to either side, and pressing, he could see. It was as if she locked her hands about her face to shield it from the thing she had been told.

"Linda!"

"Oh, Sim, do you know? Have you heard? Oh, Sim, Sim, Sim!"

He could have wept.

The doctor left to telephone from his house to the isolation hospital —"looks like a prison" she had said that day that radiant she arrived — for the ambulance; it would be here in less than an hour. Sim sat with her. "I am case proof," he had told the doctor. "I was right up against smallpox in India one time; I am officially exempt. Anyway, I must be with her; do what you like with me afterwards; send me with her; I wish to God you would." He told the Yeomans, aroused and up under these disturbances. They were deeply sympathetic; no smallest thought of risk appeared to be theirs. Old Yeoman said: "That sunbeam life for such a plague; Lord, Lord!" Margaret said: "I will come right to her, Sir."

"No, wiser not," Sim said, "and no occasion, Margaret; I will call you if she needs anything."

She needed nothing, not even words. He tried to talk with her. She just lay mute like that, arms locked upon her face.

"Pain, dear old girl? The back; that poor old head?"

Muffled beneath her hands: "How can I think of pain, Sim?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE LESSON

Now could she? How could he? When she was gone — that sunbeam to that prison, that radiant joy who had laughed gleefully at the station cab, whose next ride was an ambulance, her next — a hearse?; when she was gone, it was not of the dreadful pain that she must suffer that he thought, not of the dreadful possibility of death, sharply though stood within his mind statistics, prominent in the paper since the scare, of the mortality of the disease that had her, " 30 per cent. in unvaccinated cases "; his thought was all of that which she must suffer if she came out marred, marred as she would be as much more worse than common folk as more supremely lovely than every other she had been; of when marred thus, her golden, gleaming self's own mock and effigy, she was returned to face the circles she had queened, returned for that return which was to be her triumph, her " happy . . . oh, happy " ravishment of — Andrew.

Oh, piteous!

Andrew, who loved the picture only!

Oh, pitiable!

Andrew whom anew and lastingly, for ever, the picture was to win!

Oh, tragedy unspeakable!

His heart was wrung for a calamity so dire, so cruel, so seeming wanton; and with the seeming wantonness of it his mind, in another quarter of its distress, sought angrily to know — where, where in pity's name, could she have caught this; how, when, where? True, the disease

was in the countryside, but contact was essential. Contact was not made by people of her station, of the life that she had lived down here. Where, where in wonder's name, had she made contact?

It was his occupation while the morning passed, and while he took instructions that the cottage, he and the Yeomans confined to it, must be in quarantine for sixteen days, to go through her things; and this, while he did so (Oh, pitiable handling of her fineries and fripperies!) increasingly and with a mounting angry bafflement became the occupation of his mind — where had she made this contact? It was not answerable. All of every day that she had been here she had been under his eye, scarcely a moment out of his company ——

Wait!

He was at the drawer of the little writing-table in her room, glancing at the handwriting on the envelopes of her letters — tossed higgledy-piggledy there in her careless way — before he tore them across, not scrupling — he and she were far too great friends — when in doubt to open and glance at the letters they contained. Some staggering bills, some very ugly-looking demands for settlement, were among the heap. She seemed to have brought away with her everything that was not for Andrew's eye, everything touching that very rift all of which was going to be righted —" everything will be different now "— when she and Andrew met again. He could have wept. That gleeful thing, that lovely thing, that deeply loving thing with " I love Andrew but Andrew does not love me," that thoughtful thing with " Rum " for comment on those prayers that night, that new revealed thing with savage turn upon that woman at the cards that day — what manner of picture would she bring from out that prison to that meeting with Andrew where all depended on the lovely picture she should be? He

could have cursed. *How* could she have caught this? *how,* . . . never out of his sight . . . never an hour away from ——.

Wait!

He stood upright, letters half-torn within his hands, caught in a sudden thought. Wait! There *had* been an hour, there had been the whole of one long day when they had been apart. He set down the letters and stood there, his brows knitted. A whole day, yes! That was the day she had been going to lunch at Staverton, had gone to do so and, as he found when calling for her, had not. That was the day she came in not till late for tea and dripping wet — yes, and had sat in her wet clothes, refusing to change till she had fed; yes, and had shivered and not till then gone off to change; yes, and had told of taking shelter, when already wet, in some cottage somewhere. He struck his hand upon the open drawer. *That* was the day; *that* was the place, that cottage, not a doubt of it. He drew in his breath and held it, as drawing in and binding fast the portents now he saw. Yes, not a doubt of it; everything fitted in; the wetting, the fatigue, the shelter, the chill, the sitting in her wet clothes, the shivering; yes, and the time, the time too fitted in; "about twelve days" the doctor had told him was the period of incubation after being in contact with infection; about twelve days — it fitted exactly; it must have been just about a fortnight ago that she had done that tramp.

"About a fortnight ago?" Among those massing portents stirred like spy among a clutch of prisoners a new thing in his mind. "About a fortnight ago?" What rung familiar in that phrase? His knitted brows were closer knit as though to clamp down on this newly stirring thing and squeeze it out. "About a fortnight ago?" Who was it had used those words to him just recently? Who was it used them? When?

He remembered.

It was yesterday; it was Sir Toridd Lesson.

His hand upon the open drawer before him began to tense. The wood its fingers held was as the corner of his brain down upon which his mind, of a sudden and as with grip of steel, was squeezing.

"Lesson!" Lesson had been at Linda's house that very day when she had told him of her debts; had been (as, disturbed, suspicious, he had told Elisabeth) the very name Linda had mentioned immediately after she had told him she had ways of raising the money she must have. Lesson! Was it possible that Lesson was responsible for this? Swift as a shuttle runs there ran in train across his mind links that linked up this surmise into certitude. "Out Shifney way" Linda had admitted her tramp had taken her, further than that would say no word, had made a gleeful mystery of it and more than normally gleeful had been that evening. Was it that, building on the happiness of her reunion with Andrew, ravished by her after her separation from him, she had built up also into her scheme the plan of ridding herself of those debts whose discovery inevitably would shatter that new-made happiness? With whose purse by all the portents but by Lesson's? Had she written to Lesson? Had this appointment resulted? Had that huge pending deal of Staverton's brought him down hot-foot to win, to buy, the favours of the wife of him who had the deal and all its secrets, all its gold-mines, in his hands? Had she not on the morrow had a letter — that expressed letter — perhaps confirming what had been arranged, that had transported her with glee? Had she not used to him thereafter when tactfully he spoke of debts and friends the expression that he need worry no more on that, that everything was going to be all right and different now? Yes, yes, to every surmise! He was assured of it. He

was assured the answer to his every question was affirmative of each suspicion that every question raised. There had been that appointment and it was that appointment had done this, and all his emotions of the night and of this day — that piteous calamity of lovely Linda, that angry wonder at where she could have met this cruel, wanton fate — took head and flamed in hate against that man, that hulking mass of get-by-any-means, who few weeks before had come rosetted (no risks for him!) out of Linda's house, who only yesterday had "Linda Paris'd" her and airily spoken of dropping in to look her up.

"Only let him!" spoke Sim's thought. "Only let him! I will tell him something. Only let him, I will give him lesson!"

His teeth were clenched.

His passion at the man was such that, obsessed by it, he had no mind for further occupation at his task of sorting up. He turned from the drawer to go downstairs but only the letters he had taken up to tear remained and he would make an end to that he thought. He glanced and then tore them. One was from Lady Millicent, one an invitation, one a bill, the fourth, folded and without envelope, he opened, as the others, just to glance at the signature.

Then he saw the signature and without smallest scruple read.

Dear Mrs. Paris,

I hope you got back safely and before that rain came on. Immediately I was back here I looked into things and I write this line just to tell you that the position is as I assured you it should be. I can let you have the money — in notes — directly you get back to town. Remember, please, that you will be under no obligation

to me in the matter. If when that business I mentioned to you comes up you can give me an idea about it I shall regard the money merely as a — very good investment! If not — a good investment on some "future!"

Sincerely yours,
TORIDD LESSON.

Proof!

He tore the letter with a fury and into particles as it had been the writer's form between his hands. "Only let him come here!" a moment before had been his thought. He crushed the torn fragments in his fingers. "Only let me get my fingers to him!" now was his mutter. He opened his hands and dropped the twisted paper as it had been a strangled thing, and turned and left the room. "Only let him come here! Only let me see him!" He descended the stairs that led down to the sitting-room and he came into it and saw him.

The outer door stood open. The letter's writer stood beside the door.

Sir Toridd hailed, beamed, entered.

Sim at the foot of the stairway stood as a pillar stands.

Sir Toridd, breeched, spurred, topbooted, and looking all the bulkier for the dress, had ridden over. He had a heavy hunting crop in his hand and with it genially again saluted. "Hullo, Paris, I've come over. Linda Paris about?"

Sim said: "My sister-in-law is not"; and to the extent only of those four words, iron in the tone he spoke them but in themselves polite, he controlled himself. Then, figured upon the heavy face, the burly form, the assured, robust and self-complacent air of him that stood before him, he saw the thought, "This is the man responsible!" and his passion, like sudden hurl of sea upon a man upon

a rock, engulfed and hurled him from his balance. "I saw red," he later told Elisabeth; "real red such as I never saw or thought of even in hand-to-hand stuff in the trenches; scarlet and crimson red, I saw."

"My sister-in-law is not"; and then was swept away.

"Who in hell —", it came from him like flame, "— in hell are you Linda-ing?"

"I could not help it, Elisabeth," he told Elisabeth, telling her afterwards his every word and every deed that now he said and did, and telling it with rue. "I could not help it. The tied-up, tamed, primeval me that is at the bottom of me sprung and snapped loose like a dog with sudden frenzy snapping its chain. Poor Linda was herself to blame, as much as he perhaps. I thought no more of that than a mother thinks when her child has been out with a bigger boy and got hurt. I was there to defend, avenge that lovely Linda, that was all I thought of; her loveliness and all the loss of it would mean to her was before me, that was all I saw; this man was the cause of it, a peril to her and a blackguard to her in her duty to Andrew, that was all I knew; and, God help me, I with all my faiths and vows and hopes, those actions and those words that I have told you were where my passion took me. Passion, Elisabeth, sheer, unrestrained."

"Dear," her reply was: "Anger — there was the scourging of the money-changers from the Temple."

* * * * *

Sir Toridd at that "Who in hell?" stood like a man amazed; like a man, then, ready to laugh at what he knows must be a joke but thinks an odd one; then like a man on whom the oddness slowly overrides the fun.

"Paris!" he exclaimed. "Man alive, what the devil ——; are you drunk?"

Sim came two steps forward, his hands clenched. His

body was rigid. His voice was rigid. Stark out of his throat as though his throat were strangled his voice came. "You hear the question? Who are you calling Linda?"

Sir Toridd paled a shade. "I thought you were drunk. I hear the question, yes, a bit more politely this time."

"Answer it, damn you."

Sir Toridd took his right hand to the end of his crop and his face looked his words. "By God, Paris, I don't take that talk from any man, drunk or not. What in hell's the matter with you?"

That rigid, strangled voice: "I will tell you what in hell the matter is. It is this. My sister-in-law is not here. She has been taken away. She has got smallpox."

Sir Toridd started. "Smallpox!"

With a ring, burst out from strangle that had held it, came the voice. "Smallpox! You are in a smallpox house. We are in quarantine here. Are you frightened?"

This man was not frightened. The risk did not frighten him, the shock of the news in any case overbore him; he further was overborne by his quickening to the insults he had received and he certainly was not afraid of Sim.

Shock and insults were his standing-ground, and standing upon them he tempered the heat of one against the other. "If that is the case — if really she has got smallpox, I'm sorry. I am more sorry than I can say. And if that is the case it explains of course — a lot." He had had his hunting crop in both hands. He dropped its head to his boot. "By God, it is dreadful news. How did she get it?"

Sim came nearer. "By God, she got it through you."

Sir Toridd changed his note. His knuckles whitened on the fist that held the crop. "Paris, don't you let your madness or whatever is up with you go too far. Got it through me; what the devil are you talking about?"

"You were down here a fortnight ago?"

"I was not."

"You were at Shifney."

"What's Shifney to do with it?"

"A lot!"

"Or where I go to do with you?"

"A lot — when you take," the emotion that caused Sim's passion broke on a tremble through his passion's rigid note, "when you take — my poor Linda with you."

The term — "my poor Linda" — involuntarily used, presented to his sight the picture of that lovely thing now doomed by this most hateful thing before him. His voice rang up again, steel hard, steel clear. "Listen to me. A fortnight ago, the day you came to Shifney, you made an appointment to meet my brother's wife."

"My brother's wife." He blanched a trifle, that large man who stood before this slim and rigid fury. "My brother's wife." The implication he read in the term was that this mad and insolent young dog had knowledge that it was to buy the brother's mind that he had met the wife. He said, "We lunched, inside the hour, at the Trust House there. She caught nothing there."

"She sheltered in a cottage coming home; that is where she caught it."

Sir Toridd gave an exclamation. "Paris, I tell you I'm sorry. I am infinitely sorry. What's the good ——?"

"Damn you, keep your sorrow!"

"By God, Paris!"

"Listen to me. She caught it there."

"You fool, could I help that?"

"Coming from an appointment with you."

"Does that give me the blame?"

"By God, it gives you what is coming to you."

The hate and rage in Sim, bursting to be free, caused him to give a threatening gesture. "Look out for your-

self. It gives you what is coming to you!" he cried again.

Sir Toridd gave way a step. "By God, Paris," he said; "if you touch me!" and he bent the arm that held his crop. Sim came on a step. "She caught it there coming from you. You had had her thinking to buy my brother's secrets from his wife. That is your game. That is why you are after her. That is why you 'Linda' her; and this that has happened to her is what has come of it. Linda you dare to call her, do you?" His passion burst away, in fire from his eyes, in fury from his voice. "Linda you dare to call her? Lesson you call yourself. I've Lesson for you, damn you. Take what is coming to you — that!"

Sir Toridd raised his crop as Sim's hand came. The open palm stopped stinging on his cheek. He swung the heavy butt and crashed it.

"There was the scourging of the changers in the Temple," Elisabeth had said when Sim, rueing the passion he had shown, had told her all these things. Rueful, he none the less could not repress a sound of laugh at that. "I scourged him," he said grimly.

His right arm fended off the crop's hard smash; his left crashed home on Lesson's face. Sir Toridd sprung away. The crop was up and down again and, this time but half averted, crashed and drew blood upon the close-cropped, tawny head. A flush hit came to Lesson's mouth, reeling him back, cutting his lips and cutting the knuckles that drove on and smashed a tooth. The crop went from his hand; he was in posture of defence, and good defence, had done some boxing, had fifteen stone behind what art he knew, and checked the fury that was on him with jolt and drive that found their mark. But it was brief, that checking of that fury. Hitting with both hands, Sim was on him and following on him and

every hit a mark. Sim lashed the mouth again and shook the fifteen stone, and lashed an eye and drew the blood about it. The chin went up: the smashing left drove to it; Sir Toridd spun back to a chair and crashing on it threw it back and went his length. He was up, maddened and murderous; he was down, stunningly down, unstomached and stayed down.

Then he got up, very slowly.

Sim was breathing tremendously. Sim, looking straight upon him, had a glad, exultant picture of poor and lovely Linda in his mind.

Sir Toridd collected his cap, his crop, his senses. He went to the door. "By God, Paris, I will kill you for this," he said.

"I will take care not to stand with my back towards you," Sim said.

But when he was left he stood a moment, swaying a little upon his feet, and dropped heavily into a chair and put his elbows on his knees, his hands upon his bruised face, and sat there heavy in revulsion of his thoughts: Linda in crisis and with what before her? Andrew to tell . . . himself for sixteen days in quarantine here . . . Charles? . . . his instinct that all was not well with Charles . . . Elisabeth? . . . there with that Andiron now dying . . . himself? . . . himself . . . his certain feeling that his purpose now was close upon him and all ending here? . . . What now . . . ?

CHAPTER XIV

THE RETROSPECT

WHAT now? Now while within the compass of that thought of Sim's stood three fast-prisoned; one in those gloomy walls that she had seen and laughed at as she drove; one in Old Ballard's whilst term of quarantine should run; a third who from a life's sharp debt against her father's name nursed love at sick-bed where daily (as she saw) life rendered death a little on account; also were other three who brought to head their plans to break their prisons: "Why wait?" urged one, and urged that flight, and flight's confessions, at least escaped before too late the further wrong of portion in a blackmail fraud upon the man already wronged beyond recall; "Five hundred means a lot to me," had cried another, and with the residue of legacy of fifteen hundred pounds forged key that should escape him from the house where he had lived rent-free—"Free! Freedom! Me!"—and into cottage of his dreams such as for years had mocked him from his study-table drawer; a third whose play with fire, while down to ashes died her own hearth's glow, was reckoning now with flames.

She was aghast, this third who would escape her prison, when thus with these the flames of her desires she reckoned. "She had an infirmity," it has been written of her on an earlier page, "she had an infirmity in the fate which she told herself had come upon her, and it was that she was at base too virtuous to be able to warm her hands at the fire with which she was playing without suffering pang for the man she was deceiving." The fire

now was flame, consuming utterly; her deception now was to be revealed, stabbing that man remorselessly; and that same virtue caused her now, dismayed, to stand aghast before this outcome.

Drawn to the final step that, inevitable as night on day, as flood on ebb, now stood before her; hounded to it as prey is run by dogs by that lie told to silence Jule and by desire (as Conrad urged) to avert the effects of that lie, Alice at every turn of her thoughts came upon the final step nevertheless with shock as of one opening a cupboard and finding there a corpse. In the middle of some other occupation of her mind the realization would come; and "God!" was the form in which it came; "God!"— the horror and the check and then the crash of frozen pulses of one who suddenly is at a precipice's edge; "God, am I going to run away from Charles?"

She could not believe it of herself.

"God, am I going to run away from Charles, my husband? I? From Charles, our home, our things, our years, our life together? Am I not going to pay the tradesmen any more, order the meals, see Ellen does the bath, tell Charles to wear his coat, see that his socks are darned, his shirts with buttons, go over the laundry and put the things for mending on the little table? Is it possible that I am going to leave all that, not do it any more? Is it possible? I?"

She could not believe it of herself. Opening that cupboard and seeing that dreadful form, rehearsing to herself the simplicity, the conventionality, the faithfulness, the chastity of all her life from girlhood upwards, she is to be imagined as one in post of high responsibility — a signalman, a captain — who in moment of aberration has pulled the wrong lever, given the wrong command, and realising it stands in frozen incredulity aghast.

She could not believe it of herself.

The statement is thrice repeated because thrice of a dozen times in process of each day from dawn to dawn it caught her and each time newly, each time as though she never until now had realised it. How had this come to pass? She could not believe that "come to pass," connoting a process gradual, sequent, perceptible, possibly could be applied to it; surely this thing simply and suddenly, without warning and without reason, had *happened?* surely the ground suddenly had opened and she pitched in? What cause ever had there been for it? There was no cause whatever that to the sudden point of the interrogation she could present as shield before her breast. But *what* cause, but how, but wherefore? Her thoughts, in the first moment and by these interrogatories transfixed, would as it were draw the daggers of those questions from her bosom and gaze upon them and have them change to crystal globe wherein stood mirrored back the years. She saw herself a maiden in her parents' home, happy, having appointed duties, settled recreations, simple joys; untouched by discontent; with no concern in "movements", self-determinations, freedom, sex; she saw herself upon a day when, reading "Cranford", she had come upon the distinction in regard to view of matrimony as between the woman and the man: "When I marry," thinks the woman; "*If* I marry," says the man. She remembered how she first had smiled delightedly at that and then had laid the book upon her lap and mused, still smiling, and musing had realised, and smiled the more, that true it was of her—"When I marry"; yes, convicted she had sat, and smiled to be convicted. "When I marry"— yes, the thought, its day-dreams, castles, mirages, had been her own. Watching that past, clearly she could see that smile, vividly could feel its impulses again; a tender smile, nothing in it of wistfulness; a smile of one who smiled from present happy state towards

thought of future happy state; a smile at lovely, day-long, life-long happiness just waiting somewhere for her; at love, at lover, at wedding, husband, home. . . .

A tremor took her.

She remembered how, still in that mood, seeking to find its exploitation she had read further on into "Cranford" and had been brought to pause again at reading that idea of at morning setting on one page of a diary the writer's expectations of how the day would go, at night, on the opposite page, the records of how in fact it had been spent, and then contrasting; and she remembered rising then, mused in those earlier dreams, and writing in a secret little book her thoughts of how her life would go "When I am married", and hiding it away to write in it one day the facts and then compare.

Where was that book now? How would she write in it, what compare with those dear ardours that had there stood written?

"I am about to run away from Charles, my husband; from Charles, our home."

Again her tremor.

She saw herself first meeting Charles; she remembered the, after a little, looking forward to meeting him again; then very much wanting the next prospect of a meeting to come; then the day, and how she flushed and how her pulses beat, when, meeting him thus again, their eyes significantly met; then how his face was ever in her mind, coming between her and each and all the common things at which she looked; then how his face (that dear face as it then had grown to be) coming between all that she looked upon and her, touched all she touched so that in all her world there nothing common was, nothing that gave not back a gleam, that took not on fresh colours, nothing but smiled, had song. . . . She remembered then — she saw the garden, down by the summer-house, the frock

she wore, the suit that he was wearing . . . something he said . . . and she . . . and she was in his arms, his face to hers, his heart (she felt it beating) on her heart . . . his lips against her own. . . .

God, and it now had come to this, that she was leaving him!

Yes, in his arms, there by the summerhouse; and she remembered how, when, affianced, they lived that rapt embrace again, he told her that it was her " funny little way " of saying Yes that suddenly had " made him do it." How used she to say Yes? She remembered him mimicking her —" Inwards instead of outwards, you say it: ' Yeh,' like that! "— and their laughing at it. How they had laughed! Did she still say Yes like that, she wondered? Had Conrad noticed it?

Conrad!

Ah, at that name, striking upon it in the midst of these rehearsals as suddenly and surprisingly as in the midst of other occupation she had come upon the stark realisation of leaving Charles, onset as of a swoon would flood among her senses, wash her adrift from every solid purchase of her feet, from every stable mooring of her principles, and float her, as drugs or drink or hypnosis will float their creatures, in mazy planes of disembodied trance. Conrad! Those steel-shod arms of his about her (she could feel them); that vibrant voice of his within her ears, calling amongst the fibres of her being as a musician's hands amongst his keys; that strong-set face, its steady eyes, its mobile lips, that mirrored back to her her soul (embraced in his) as it were waters stilled at evening over which she stooped . . . Conrad! That sense when in his presence (she could feel it now) as of the welling from him into her of element surcharging all her veins with glow as sunlight causes stirring of the naked flesh; that flooding from her bosom out to him as if

some duct within her breast had burst and with an exquisite relief streamed forth. . . . Conrad! Oh, love and lover transcending all of rapture she had ever heard, much less had ever known; weighing, as she poised it, all the world in balance and counting every treasure in the other scale, each virtue, each material possession, yes, if so need were, life itself, as so much cumbrance cut away from bliss! Conrad!

Apotheosed, she would be rendered as it were aswoon.

Where now those poignances for Charles?

Astonishingly, they still would be within her, beclouded only by these raptures as is the dun of western firmament by raptures, gold and crimson, of the setting sun. She had an infirmity in this fate which she told herself had come upon her and it was that she was at base too virtuous not to suffer pangs for him that she deceived; and always, as the dull firmament behind the glow, her pangs were there and would be there till haply time, like night, descending should expunge them.

It would be conjectured of her that in moments of such abandonment to love as came to her with thought of Conrad she would have got up in the veritable presence of Charles and walked from the house with Conrad without a qualm. But she would have gone with Conrad in the veritable presence of Charles in any of the moments that now she lived, even in one that had her in the very act of startled realisation of what it was that she proposed to do, even in one that had her in the very process of conning over (with pain) the record of what had been and of what now had come to be. In the one part all her moments coursed now ceaselessly to and fro in the hourglass that was her heart and Conrad's, sealed up therein as sand within the glass, turned hour by hour to run and heap again from hers to his, from his to hers; in the other part, held to Charles alike by all her native principles

and, of those principles, by all her pain at giving pain, she was driven from Charles into Conrad's arms by that lie, stealing from him a thousand pounds, told to save herself from Jule; and driven never so surely as in those very moments when, realising the pass to which her play with fire had brought her, she saw in refuge with Conrad refuge from the pain of watching unsuspecting Charles, haven from which at least she could declare her falsehood at the death-bed and declaring it at least not rob in actual gold the man she robbed in faith and loyalty. But at no moment would she have gone from Charles or could she think on going from him with no qualm. "I am very fond of Charles," months back, when first she knew this coming on her, she had said to Sim; "This is my Will — that you shall remember I am fond of Charles"; and her fondness, seeded in her simple-mindedness, nurtured in her conventional faithfulness, rooted in her basic virtue, dragged at her now in the thought of parting from him, of abandoning him, as drags at mother's heartstrings the child she must needs leave in England to follow love of husband to the East.

Alice never had mothered Charles in the degree in which some husbands are mothered of their wives, that degree in which the husband is party to the mothering, leaves all things to his other half either to pick up after him or to arrange before him as does a child with its "Oh, Mother will see to that," and with a child's indifferent air. Charles beneath his burdens, real or fancied, was entirely too querulous, too warped, too self-absorbed, self-pitiful for such; but he was mothered of Alice in the degree of an ungracious child by a nurse whose sense of duty, inbred as her creature instincts, falters never, who knows to the smallest detail all her charge's needs, who has come to think him, in those needs, incapable without her, who would regard the leaving of him as culpable complicity in

the disasters which, without her care, inevitably would overtake him, but who — this was the plight with Alice — must flee to avert the consequences of a crime committed in his house.

Alice, that nurse, was going to leave — saw herself driven by her crime, that hush-money extracted for Jule, to leave — that charge who was her husband Charles.

She could not believe it of herself.

Back at that incredulous amaze again, come to it now through thought on Conrad, she would examine it now from the point that if Conrad had never come into her life this betrayal of all her principles would never have come into her life; and asking herself how it had happened, how in wonder's name, in virtue's name, in name of all her nature, traits, principles, habits of mind and body, she had suffered love that was dishonourable love to come to pass, she would rehearse its processes as she had rehearsed the process of her life up to the joining of her life with Charles.

First he had come to the house, this new doctor, with Dr. Blake, brought around in course of a tour of introduction to the patients before Dr. Blake set off on his holiday cure and he took over the practice. She had taken, if any notice of him at all, a something prejudiced notice. She was accustomed to Dr. Blake and to Dr. Blake's ways and she disliked the idea of a new man, with new ways, fussing in and having to be attended to. He looked, too, this — what was his name? She had not caught his name nor troubled to try to; something Burn, she thought, or Brown was it? —he looked, whatever his name was, too young to be "a proper doctor", had no bedside manner or anything approaching it, nor any personality in the least of the kind in which one would care to confide; his manner if anything was the precise reverse of those qualities — rather brusque, rather quick, rather

vigorous. Something had been said, by himself or by Dr. Blake, she did not remember, or care to remember, which, about his having been on a voyage, or been in the navy or something, and he looked as a matter of fact more like a sailor than a doctor, much more. Who on earth would want a sailor as a doctor? She thought it was rather cool of Dr. Blake to come and plant him in the house like that. She was not in the least bound to employ him; because Dr. Blake called regularly there surely was no obligation on her that this man should call regularly. She would tell him, she thought, at his first visit, that she would write when she next required him — he would know what that meant — and she would get in Dr. Evans.

That was the beginning. Who could have imagined that out of such a beginning . . . ?

His first call chanced to be on a day that Charles had stayed at home with a bad cold. He had seen Charles and had prescribed for him; the two had talked chess together; when he had gone Charles had expressed a liking for him, and by this liking her intention of substituting Dr. Evans was countered — the new-comer settled forthwith in Dr. Blake's place. She had accepted the position and, the first wave of prejudice dissipated, had felt indifferent to the matter. To Conrad Bryne himself she was and remained entirely indifferent. Quite a friendship sprang up between him and Charles and she was glad; it was so unusual for Charles to make a friend. He came to dinner one night for the purpose of chess; he began shortly to come for the same purpose on a regular night of every week. She remembered perfectly well those early dinners. Conrad, with his travels, was an entertaining talker, and it might ordinarily have been pleasant to have him, but two things put him out of the ordinary and his company was of no attraction to her. In the first place she had a curious dis-ease in meeting socially doctors whom also she met

professionally, a relic perhaps of her girlhood when a doctor, like a schoolmistress, was one whom authority seemed to set outside the pale of normal relations, a feeling, anyway — as some people have in regard to policemen — that doctors were not "ordinary", not quite human; and in the second place this Dr. Bryne somehow was ticketed in her mind as Charles's friend, not hers, there for Charles's pleasure, not in the least for hers, and dinner rather to be hurried over in order that the pleasure (chess) might speedily be got at. These were fancies which combined to put the guest in a category detached, in an atmosphere foreign, and she would get up immediately the dessert was on the table and would be in the drawing-room sewing or reading when the two looked in on their way to their game and just would glance up and smile perfunctorily, perhaps murmur "The chess now?", perhaps say nothing, and give again her own occupation, its thread unbroken, her complete attention.

That was the continuation. Who could have imagined that out of such a continuation . . . ?

For weeks thus; and then —; then, right in the middle of this hinterland of dull indifference, untouched by any freshening breeze from sea of mutual tastes; right in the settled itinerary of this established route, unbroken by any halt in wayside shade of common affinities; suddenly, amazingly, then that night of which afterwards he had told her: "There was a night here in this very room when I looked up and saw you with half the lamplight, half the shadow on your face!" and telling her, "God, how do these things happen?" had cried.

How? She had glanced up and caught that look and had a sudden tiny shock — no more and meaningless, a sudden emotion, portending nothing, come and gone like a transient tiny touch of pain in an abundantly healthy

frame. He had left the room and she had read a page or two more of her book and found her mind awander and had set down the book and thought — whatever was it? . . . something different . . . something suddenly different in that Dr. Bryne . . . whatever was it? . . . and then later he had come in to say good night, and had said it, and had looked her in the eyes, and had gone.

And she had gone to bed preoccupied . . . whatever was it?

Whatever it was, she remembered — feeling it now as she rehearsed these passages as she had felt it then — awakening next morning with a sense of awakening to something waiting, to something left uncompleted overnight, as to a puzzle left downstairs unfinished and calling to be taken up again. He was due to visit Old Gand that day, and came. She arranged herself before the glass before she went in to him; she could not have said why. When she was ready she hesitated a moment before she took the step and went; she could not have said wherefore. Then she went in to where he was. . . . She could not have said what she expected to find. What she did find was the sense as of a tiniest subtlest difference in their relations. A new intimacy? Far from that. A new friendliness? No, from even friendliness it was as far. It was a sense, rather, of restraint . . .

She got up once when in these cogitations of those days she had reached thus far, and on the sudden stirring of a remote thought, an obscure recollection, disturbed somewhere in her mind, went to her bedroom and took up a book and turned its opening pages.

That strange restraint that there had been between them . . . ?

She found the passage.

"And the eyes of them both were opened and they knew that they were naked."

CHAPTER XV

THE PROSPECT

It happened that Charles called her at the moment of that occasion of these revisualisations of hers in which she had come upon that passage in that book; and she set the book down (her hand trembling a little) and went to him, resuming her thoughts at another time. In their place they shall be resumed for her; it is suitable to the picture here to have them irrupted by call from Charles because in these days her life — the life of the twain, both set on breaking of their prisons — often was like that; Charles often was suddenly wanting her or suddenly breaking in on her to have her attention or her help.

Charles was packing!

The statement is of purpose written so because set thus, in line by itself and with a note of exclamation to itself, it has a rather perky air, a kind of "Whatever do you think I have got!" air, and that was the air — extraordinary, almost grotesque on the careworn, fretful face of Charles — with which he first announced to Alice the project which, when established, would bring packing in its train.

"Do you know what I am going to do with that five hundred of Old Gand's left after Jule has his thousand?"

This was about a week after Sim's departure from that visit for the funeral in which he had noticed at the reading of the Will the sudden absorbed air of Charles when the reversion to him of the business and of the legacy was announced; had seen outside the bank the sudden, upward, suppressed-excitement, tipped-schoolboy look which went

with the "Five hundred means a lot to me"; had observed in the following days the "waiting for something" air which seemed to wish to be left alone to plot and plan that something; and this — this question suddenly sprung before Alice — was as it were the cord and wrapping of the surprise-packet containing those signs and symptoms bursting from inward pressure to let the secret free.

"Do you know what I am going to do with that five hundred of Old Gand's left after Jule has his thousand?"

Alice had not been there to see that tipped-schoolboy-big-with-plans look outside the bank; she saw it now; a quite amazing alteration of Charles's face: sunshine and mischief, twenty years younger, a youth again.

"Do you know what I am going to do with it?"

She stared at him.

"No, Charles, what?"

He grinned; grin, a word impossible for any expression on the troublous face of Charles nevertheless was the only word. He grinned. The packet burst asunder: "I am going to buy a country cottage!"

That was Charles when the thing was in prospect. It now was here in fact. He had found at last and bought the cottage now; it was for departure on a first, an inaugural visit to it that he now was packing; it was for her to come and help him in his preparations that he had called to her (as in these days he always was calling to her) while she was searching for and coming upon that passage in that book.

She set down the book (her hand trembling a little) and went to him. "Yes, something I can do for you, dear?"

She had not used that term to him like that — that "dear" in familiarly fond substitution for a name — for years that stretched before these days. She used it frequently now in these days that quickly shrunk away

from where the moment of her leaving of him stood. She always had been, as has been told of her, if not mother and affectionately indifferent child in her relations to him, at least devoted nurse and heedless charge. It was calamitously augmentative of her pangs at her betrayal of him that in these days of this cottage craziness of his she found herself placed to share with him, to help him in, invited to share with him and begged to help him in, his enthusiasms and his preparations precisely as gaily is invited to share and eagerly is desired to help, and shares and helps (and weeps) a mother whose son excitedly is packing to be off into the world.

Charles literally was packing to be off into the world: the world he had never known; of freedom, of peace, of restful and of silent places: the world whose four good walls were walls of cottage of his dreams; whose circumambient planes were planes of tranquil, open, spreading, hill'd, wooded, meadowed, by-path'd, green-laned countryside.

The adjectives are his. His mind teemed with them, piling them one on the other as his imagination called them up, drinking the scenes that each one as he found it conjured for his eyes, until his senses, hypnotised, would swim.

He frequently would crash then.

In the midst of his giddy trance of expectation, in the inmost maze of his vertigo of exultation, like a drunken man suddenly shocked into sobriety, like an eager footballer suddenly crashed in the face and dazed, like a careering huntsman suddenly dashed to ground and stunned, he suddenly would come to earth, realise that the thing was not yet, that he still was here; that he was not a fit man such as him he visioned footing it tirelessly among those peaceful, lovely places but a gone-soft and nerve-wracked man, trembling here (for no conceivable

reason) where still he stood; that he was not a buoyant, free, lighthearted man such as him he visioned whistling about within those cottage walls but an oppressed and brooding man filled up, weighed down, with habit of years of grinding stress. He would be filled to the brim with ardent exaltation of spirit and suddenly the whole thing would pour away out of him and he be left drained as by a severed artery, empty as by the pricking of a bladder.

To a dispassionate observer cause for alarm might have appeared in symptoms such as these — in these set-backs, sudden and devastating, from enthusiasm; in these evaporations, instantaneous and abysmal, from highest pitch to lowest depth. But none dispassionate was there to see them. Charles, acutely though they taxed him, they in no way alarmed; Alice, accustomed to him nervous and dejected, found strange in him only his periods of high elation and at these had concern solely of remorse at the way in which, elevated, tipped-schoolboy and wildly planning schoolboy, he turned to her to share and help his plans.

His plans in the first days following his disclosure of his project to her ran in a train that at every turn gave her new remorse at the wrong done him by the lie told to secure Swiss Jule's silence, new impetus to the drive of that lie which was the very reason forcing her towards the final step of leaving him. Daily he would be finding in the advertisements of his newspaper the cottage of his dreams. He would write for particulars; he would be convinced that this *was* the very cottage for him; he would plan it out to her by the hour; draw plans from the description given and show them to her; search out the situation on the map and pore over the surrounding district and imaginatively, ecstatically, describe it to her; feverishly wait upon the post and at last receive the answer

and with fingers that shook open it before her — and always the price was much beyond him, always, by some malignant fate, it was in the region of that precise sum of £1,500 which would have been his but for the vile dishonour of her lie to save herself, but for the pathetic honour of his attitude towards what, solely through her, he believed to be the dead man's injunction.

She would watch his face, eager, ashine and atremble with excitement, as, opening the letter, eagerly his eyes devoured the entrancing details of the cottage, eagerly his voice in thrilled half-sentences delivered them to her — "It has got a sundial on the lawn! — It is sixteenth century! — It is one of those half-timbered, black and white ones! — It has got a little orchard and a south wall with fruit trees."—And then she would see his face cloud, twist, disfigure; moisture come to his eyes; weariness, catch and break in his voice: "It is no good. It is twelve hundred"—"Ah! oh, Alice, cruel; sixteen-fifty he wants for it"—"It is no good. Too much again. 'Fifteen hundred for immediate sale.'"

Through her heart a sword would go.

"Why wait?" How wait and suffer this?

Worse even were the days when, crazy almost over some cottage of his dreams transcending all his dreams seen in the morning paper, "very moderate," "sacrifice for quick offer," and situated admirably alike for surroundings and for easy access, nothing would rest him but he must dash off there and then "and secure it." It never was "and see it"; it always was "and secure it": and certain, all his disappointments notwithstanding, that secure it he would, away from an untouched breakfast he would go, wild with excitement, so eagerly sharing with her in these days as even to snatch a kiss at her before he left, turning and waving from the gate, a thing not done since first they married; and always, left alone, she

knew how it would be and always it was so — return at night fagged utterly out, down to the very crypt of disappointment and depression, dropping into a chair and sitting there all the evening staring heavily before him. "It was wonderful. It was just a dream. Oh, my God, Alice, when I first saw it I just could have gone down on my knees and worshipped. Fifteen hundred."

Like a sword!

He never in all that time, not in the blackest of these despondencies, uttered the word of a sentiment approaching to any thought of not doing his duty, or of by any degree paring down his duty, in the matter of the thousand pounds to be paid when probate was declared to Jule. For this his lifetime's dream he had available no resources other than his legacy and he regarded his legacy as the fixed, flat sum of five hundred pounds, capable of expansion by not a penny.

"Oh, Alice, when I saw it my heart just leapt right out to it. Fourteen fifty."

Why wait? Always, since the very beginning, she had been driven as by whips to this the fate which (still she told herself) "had come upon her." Now as by scorpions she was driven. Why wait?

A day came bringing her relief for which, when Charles burst the news upon her, she could have gone (and that night did go) upon her knees and thanked God. In the morning he had dashed off after one of his advertisement-column discoveries; in the evening he returned beside himself with transports. He had found it! Ideal! Within his means! Five hundred!

Relief unspeakable to her; but now upon her from a new quarter new swords, new thrusts, new pains. Hitherto her sufferings had been in his disappointments, and she the cause of them; now they were in his triumphs, in his plans and preparations not for a thing that might

be could he but find it, but for a thing that was, that he had found, and she invited to share them, made to minister to them, with the question, coming to her at every turn of them, "God, am I going to leave him, Charles, my husband; I?" It was the mother attending to her son packing to be off into the world; nurse driven by her own crime to desert her charge and leave him to his fate; sister attending the jubilations of brother over whom, all unconscious of it, she knows a doom to hang.

He was uncommonly glad now, at every hour he expressed himself, that he had not been able to buy any of the other cottages he had seen. This that miraculously he had secured had a feature, expressed in a phrase of the advertiser's, which had he taken one of the others and then heard of it, would have filled him, he declared, with regret and longing and dissatisfaction. "In a fold of the Downs" was the feature and the phrase. The advertisement had opened with it: "In a Fold of the Downs. Artist's Cottage"; and from the very moment of his eye lighting upon the words they had sprung in his mind with the roots and with the wildness of a climbing plant. "In a fold of the Downs." It was the articulate and visible expression of all the yearnings for peace, solitude, tranquillity which all his life he had been able to utter and to imagine only vaguely, in a dream, in a cloud. "In a fold of the Downs." He would go about the house repeating it to himself in a kind of rapture as an absorbed devotional telling his beads. "In a fold of the Downs." On any book or paper in his hand he would draw the contours of a range of hills; at dinner he would mash up his potatoes and plan out with his knife the fold in which actually the cottage stood.

She could have laughed; but she could have wept.

It was in Sussex, on the South Downs. It was six miles from the railway station: it stood, right in the angle

of its fold, hillside before and all about you as you stood in the doorway, absolutely alone, not another habitation anywhere near it.

Hearing this the first, and then perhaps the hundredth, time, "Won't it be lonely?" she said.

"Ah! Lonely!"

The "Ah!" was an impatient exclamation, uttered by itself, not as a happy sigh joining the "lonely."

"Ah! Lonely! Don't you understand that loneliness is the very thing about it that I want? Don't you realise that to be right alone where there is not another soul or sound or sight except just space and solitude is the one thing I long for? Don't you understand that? Surely to goodness you realise that by now?"

Irritation such as this, amounting often to savage exasperation done in sudden outburst, was symptomatic of a state of mind which alternated with his raptures, his ecstasies, now that the dream of his life was on the point of realisation, waiting only the few weeks before the date on which the vender of the cottage wished to give up possession. If "In a fold of the Downs" was one obsession of Charles's mind in these days, another, equally rooted, equally raging, was that something would interfere to stop him, to wreck the transaction or his enjoyment of it. The owner would change his mind; the executors would find that he was not entitled to the legacy, or that the legacy was not forthcoming from the estate; the cottage would be burnt down — all manner of the most absurd fancies filled his mind, and any smallest suggestion of possible difficulties, such as Alice's idea that the place might be lonely, he received as threats inimical to his design which somehow might take form and force and stay him.

To what degree he carried this fear was illustrated painfully almost having regard to the apparent heart-

lessness it showed, but it is to be remembered for Charles that, never normal, he now was at pitch of abnormality) by his reception of the news, telephoned by Andrew, that Linda had taken smallpox. Alice, too beset by her own concerns to feel quite all that she might have felt, yet was sympathetic, shocked. Charles would discuss with her no aspect of that side of the case. The aspect solely to which his mind immediately sprung was that this was going to imperil his first week-end, only a fortnight away now, at his cottage. "Smallpox! The one disease on the face of the earth, the absolute only disease that ever happens in England that could get in my way at a moment like this! It is unbelievable. Who could have dreamt of such a thing? There is a fate on me, there is a fate on me!"

She was dismayed at him. "Charles, however can poor Linda having it possibly stop you, possibly affect you?"

He threw up his arms, exasperated. "How can it? How can't it? It is certain to. Don't you see? You don't seem to see anything. They hunt down these cases like tigers, these health authorities. Anyone anyway connected with a case is hunted down, quarantined, shoved away somewhere. That is what is going to happen to me; I know it; I know it!"

"Charles, how can you, we, possibly be connected with it, hundreds of miles away? How possibly ——"

"Well, see that we aren't, see that we aren't! If a letter comes from Sim, if he in quarantine is mad fool enough to write a letter to tell us all about it, just the insane, mad-headed thing he is likely to do, it is not to be opened; you perfectly understand that? It is not to be opened. It is to be burnt at once, at once, the very instant it comes into the place. And this isn't to be talked about, not to a soul, mind; not a soul is to know that she has

got it. You understand? You perfectly well understand?"

"Charles, of course I understand ——"

But he was gone from the room. "Of all the incredible, of all the unlikely — there is a fate on me, there is a fate on me ——" and he was gone.

This was now his new, and as it proved, for time was getting on and went quickly, his last alarm. His plan in regard to the cottage was that it should be a week-end cottage and that for his first visit he should go down alone and be absolutely alone there, revelling it, for a whole week which he would take from the office. Jamieson, his chief assistant, was to look after the business, and now his nervous panic was that Jamieson would get smallpox — he knew it, he was certain of it. Useless to remonstrate with him, to point out that the epidemic never had really come to London, that it now was abating wherever it had been and scarcely was mentioned in the papers; remonstrance only made him worse. Jamieson would get it. He knew it. If that did not happen something else would. He knew it, he knew it.

But the fortnight safely sped; nothing happened; in the last few days his forebodings alike of smallpox and of every other possible contingency fell away from him; he now was only in ecstasy of anticipation, in thrill of preparation, packing. He was buying the cottage unfurnished, but it suited the owner to leave all his belongings there for a month from the date of Charles's occupancy and this he had agreed to do. Charles talked a great deal about the furniture. Every piece of it had been selected by the owner, an artist, to be in keeping with the lovely old-fashioned place it filled and Charles would stare about at the "hideous Victorian monstrosities" (as he called them) of their own house and declare that nothing here but would be an outrage to and would ruin the cottage if

taken down. What he would do when the perfect stuff now there was removed he could not imagine. He would rather camp out in the place empty than desecrate it and spoil all his delight in it with " abortions " from here or with gimcrack imitation stuff such as he could afford to buy. It was remarkable, and it was newly distressing to Alice, that now, in these gloomy speculations, he did for the first time mention and pathetically (to her) regret the thousand pounds which must be paid to Jule.

" That thousand," he would say, " I am always thinking of that thousand now. By jove, it does seem cruel . . . it is rather hard luck. . . ."

He never actively complained, he never suggested notion of trying to avoid his duty; " It does seem rather hard luck," said wistfully, was the most of his expression of his feeling. That was the pathos of it to Alice; that, in a new degree — ever some new degree — was " why wait? " again presented.

" That thousand," he would say, " I have been working it out. It does seem rather bad luck. The chap will sell the whole of his furniture and fittings just as they stand, and you know they are just *part* of the place, as much part of it as is the fold of the Downs it is tucked into, for three hundred pounds. I could do that with the thousand; I could do that, have the perfect things in the perfect house, and then I have thought a car — I could get a car and I could pretty well live there, run in and out to the station every day . . . oh, imagine it . . . by jove, it is hard, it is a bit hard. . . ."

" Why wait? "

The last days came. He was always coming in now with special purchases made specially for his trip. Over them and over his schoolboy glee in them (" God, am I going to run away from him, from Charles, my husband? ") she could have wept. One day it was a suitcase. " I have

nothing but that appalling old Gladstone bag, you know. No one uses a Gladstone nowadays. Do you know, though, it is not remarkable that that is all I have got. I believe I haven't had a holiday pretty well since Gladstone died. Think of that! Oh, rather, must have a suitcase, you know. Look at it, Alice; isn't it a beauty? Will I get everything in, do you think? Come and help me to try now, just a practice packing. Come on!" Another day it was a belt. "Must wear a belt down in the country, you know. Everybody does. Do you know, I believe I have never worn a belt since I was at school? Watch me stick it on. Just hold up my coat at the back, will you?" And on another: "Alice, Alice, come here; just come here; just come here and see what I have got!" It is a brown paper parcel at which excitedly he is fumbling. "Just look — imagine this for me — there — look! Took my shoes, you see, and had special thick soles put on them and these absolutely clinking golf nails shoved in! Aren't they fine! Absolutely must have nails for ranging about on the downs, you know. I will shove them on, I absolutely must, and try them out in the garden. Come on out with me and see. Alice, do you know it is absolutely the first time in my life I have ever worn spikes! Come on out with me and see me in them."

"I will come in a moment."

She hardly could speak. Get from him to wipe her eyes, to steady herself, she must. "In one moment I will come, Charles."

"God, am I going to run away from him, from Charles, my husband?"

Why wait? How — *how* wait, with tortures such as these?

It was the last night. The suitcase was packed, every stitch of it with her own hands, he fussing gleefully about her; every stitch of it stab in her heart; she would go

when he was gone, her mind was made up now to that.

It was the last hours. He talked unceasingly, waiting no response, of the cottage, telling her in order and in detail each particular that already he had told her a hundred times before.

"And over the chimney piece in the sitting-room are, whatever do you think, *pike-rests*. Imagine it! Not gun-rests; they are too far apart for that; the chap says there is not the slightest doubt that the people who lived there in Elizabethan times when the place was built kept their pikes there — pikes, you know, a sort of spear; and the doorway made very narrow so that only one man could come in at a time and a pike just the thing of course to keep an enemy out with. Imagine it! Imagine me — *me* — living in a place like that and touching the things those Elizabethan people touched! Imagine it. . . ."

Lucky he did not wait responses from her. She could not respond. Her heart, her throat, were charged to point of pain, bursting, stifled.

"The chap says — now just imagine this — that when he first got the place and was pulling it about to restore it, it was practically in ruins you know, down in a crack in one of the window-frames he found an Elizabethan shilling! Just imagine that where I am going to stand someone four hundred years ago stood and dropped a shilling and perhaps got a knife and tried to wangle it out and couldn't and left it there — for me! It is in the house now. By jove, I shall just stand by that window and think of it. Wonderful, eh? and, me, me there, the place mine! Can you believe it? Wonderful, eh?"

She effects: "Charles, wonderful!"

"The chap says I ought to try to pick up an old flint-lock gun or two and wangle those pike-rests to carry them. He says they would look fine. He has had a peg put nearer in to one of the pike-rests where he kept his

own gun, a modern one. He used it for potting rabbits and he is taking it away with him. Don't I wish he was leaving it! But he has got an old horse-pistol too he used for scaring birds and he is leaving that and says I can have pots with it if I like. I shall too, you bet."

Her murmur: "Ah, be careful, Charles."

"The chap says . . . The chap says . . . The chap says . . ." He is at it all the evening. He wakes in the night and calls to her and tells her more.

It is the last morning. The cab has come for him. He is crazy with excitement. He kisses her jovially, affectionately. She goes to the gate with him. He kisses her again. Will she faint while he holds her thus? His hat falls off and actually he laughs as he dives for it. He is in, that wonderful new suitcase by his side, his arm upon it. He leans from the window and waves to her; has off his hat and waves, waves, waves it.

He is gone.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FOLD IN THE DOWNS

He is come to the cottage.

Night now had fallen; he had been there since early afternoon, and he was standing now in the middle of the living-room; just standing there and had been standing just like that for quite a considerable time.

Everything had been splendid during the daylight; he now was experiencing the darkness and what he experienced here was a sense, solely, of the enormous silence all about him. He could feel it as if it were an atmosphere; he could hear it as if it were immensely distant music, half-caught, sounding in his ears; and he just stood there feeling it and listening to it. He kept on holding his breath. When he breathed he breathed with the shallowest possible movement of his chest. It was as though he was afraid of putting upon this utter stillness one tiny, slightest sound.

All the time right up till now, it now was ten o'clock, he had been actively busy, continuously and engrossingly occupied — unpacking, arranging, exploring, examining; in general, happily and absorbedly fussing; much too busy and excited to eat, and he had eaten nothing all day long. He could not touch any breakfast at home, or any lunch in town, nor so much as think of preparing himself a meal down here; and now, the happy fussing done, nothing whatever now to do, had no desire for nor thought of food or of other creature or material thing; just stood caught up in, bound all about by, this enormous, this sentient and articulate silence.

He had arrived. He had paid and dismissed the car, then he had found the key where the owner had arranged to leave it, under the blue tile, which was loose and lifted up, of the crazy paving just by the rain-water butt. What thrill in that alone! His own blue tile, its secret his alone; his own crazy paving, gloriously sunwarmed where he stooped and touched it; his own rain-water butt, three parts full, and he stood on a wooden block beside it and reached down his fingers to the water to salute it. He would touch, he told himself, each single separate thing in and about the house and then he would go up on to the fold of the downs (his own fold!) and in benison place his hands down flat upon the lovely springy turf. Ah!

He put the key in the door and turned it and entered and had a gust of emotion almost to the point of tears. Cottage of his dreams! Ideal cottage, ideal's heart and zenith of all the ideals of all his thinking years! And his, his own! "Mine, Mine!" he whispered and his arms made a motion of extending to embrace it and to give passage to his heart that rushed from him upon it. The door opened directly into the living-room, a long, narrow room, with every piece of furniture looking as if it were as much an essential piece of the room as the windows or the beams; with those pike-rests and he went straight across and touched them first; with that hearth, capacious as a small vestibule, and he stepped into it and peered up and saw the little patch of sky, like a blue, shining plate, ringed overhead; with this great baking-oven built in the solid wall, fitted now with an oaken shutter and used by that artist for his wine-bin, bottles there and glasses, and he went to his suitcase and eagerly rummaging it brought out tobacco tin and pipes and put them in the bin; with that very old bureau standing immediately opposite the door that had an astounding secret drawer in it which the artist had shown him, and he went to it and

touched out the secret drawer and put all his money from his pockets into it; with that old horse-pistol kept somewhere in this bureau with which he was to have pots at birds, and he rummaged in the drawers for it and found it and noted how neatly that chap had had it adapted to take small shot-cartridges and that a box of cartridges was here beside it, and he pointed it about the room and imagined himself potting with it — fun!; with that old grandfather clock, so old it would not go, but you could make it tick a minute, that chap said, by swinging the pendulum, and he went to it and opened the case and swung the pendulum and made it tick — fine!; with that ——. He comprehended in survey each smallest thing the room contained, to each paid tribute. Each, every separate thing, was separate and individual ecstasy. He moved about the room, touching all, sitting on every chair and from its angle viewing, absorbing, emotionally thrilling to all.

Another door gave into a barn, fitted up for and used by the artist as his studio; he went in there. A third door gave to the stairway above which were two bedrooms; he went up there, selected his bed and got out sheets and pillowcases and prepared it for the night. He unpacked; he went through all the little library of books, treasures here, nearly all of them, that all his life he had meant to read and never had; Jove, the evenings he would spend, in that chair there, books and the lamp and his baccy and a glass on that little table there! Happy, happy! He could have gone on his knees and poured out, just to pour it out, the tumult of happiness that raced within his mind, the riot of joyousness that surged within his heart.

He put on those famous shoes with their glorious spikes, girt about him that famous belt, and took up his stick and went out and climbed the downs and ranged about the summit of the fold that was his own fold; drew

in, in tremendous breaths, the strong, fine air and held it in his lungs and sent it roaring out again; gazed with a feeling of pushing out his eyes to their uttermost across spaces unhindered, limited only by the margins of the world; lay flat upon his back and gazed up, up into cloudless perfect blue until, self-hypnotised, he seemed to himself to be rising up there, to be suspended, floating there. O happiness!

He had started out late. Evening was drawing about the downs and he had all the garden and its outbuildings, the well, the sheds, the ruins where another cottage once had stood, to examine, touch, explore, while yet the light sufficed him. He trod eagerly back, unconscious of fatigue though all the day body and mind alike had been drawn upon as not in his life before had he taxed them, and it was dusk, night almost, before he had done the excursions of the garden and was again indoors. New thrills here now. All the place and each and every object in the place to be seen now by lamplight, and he lit the lamps and for hours flying like moments still was busy as before, still occupied engrossingly and ceaselessly, still utterly, sublimely and ecstatically detached from every conscious feeling of the self that he had known (and suffered) whose history he had written in that book of life of his which never a day till now had gone unread.

And then, quite suddenly, he was returned to that self. Quite suddenly, standing in the middle of the room, he realised that he had done everything, seen everything, handled everything, unpacked, settled, sorted everything. What was he to do now? He had no idea. Everything, quite suddenly, seemed to have — stopped. His own identity, forgotten as in excitement a pain is forgotten, seemed in that stoppage to have sprung upon him and in that stoppage to have him — fastened.

And with the sense of all things stopped — his occupa-

tions, his energies, his very heart, time, life, the world itself, all, all stopped; and with the sense of himself by his own identity refastened — an actual and ponderable weight pressing down upon him as though one bestrode his shoulders; his mind, his head, encompassed as with bands; his limbs, his body, constricted as with chains; all, all of him fastened, tied tight; with these he just stood there, a long time, in the middle of the room, conscious, resultant on the cessation of all things and of the rigidity in which he was held, solely of the enormous silence that was all about him, feeling it as if it were an atmosphere, hearing it as if it were immensely distant music, half-caught, sounding in his ears.

He would not have said, if he could have thought (but he could not think) and could have articulated his thoughts, that he was depressed, oppressed; but it is to be said for him that he was here caught in that selfsame headlong plunge from heights of elation to depths of fears which in the recent days of his ecstatic planning so frequently had possessed him, and was caught now, not as then in old and familiar surroundings, but in a new and very strange environment. It was said for him then that those sudden cuttings of the ground from beneath his feet had in them cause for alarm but did not alarm him. The ground, time, life, the solid world itself, now were gone from beneath him as he just stood there listening, but he was conscious only of the environment in which this was happening to him — the silence.

The silence! There is a phrase, said of one gazing over an enchanting prospect, of being intoxicated, drugged with beauty; he was as it were gazing out over illimitable vistas of silence and he was intoxicated, drugged with stillness.

The silence! He produced an effort and moved and went on his toes (awed) across the room and stood upon

the threshold of his outer door and gazed before him. The silence! The moon was full, the fold of the downs was fold of lustrous silver, there was no breath of breeze, there was not a sound, there was not a movement. The silence! His drugging of it advanced a heavy stage. The silence now not only was felt of him, not only was heard of him, it now, lustrously gleaming, was visible to him. More heavily drugged of it, he felt himself possessed now of the vertigo and of the impulse which, seizing some mentalities when looking down a great height, cause the desire to impel themselves headlong down. He was seized uncontrollably with the desire to impel, to hurl himself, into this silence, to become a part of it and to be absorbed in it for ever. His old identity was upon him. Scenes that he had endured in his life stood up within his mind and he had the feeling — a great pain at the back of his neck — that he was holding them back with his head to prevent them rushing upon and rupturing that lustrous fold of silence that stood enormously still, enormously immovable before his eyes — scene of himself the night Sim came to the deathbed saying to Sim, " I can't go on like this, old man "; scene of himself ——; they crowded upon him, pressing against his neck that pressed to keep them back.

They would return to be lived again, anew, scenes such as those! He would go back from this place and into them again! This silence! He swayed. He thought that if he pitched himself forward he could pitch himself into it, disappear into it, and he felt that pitch himself forward into it he must. . . .

Enormously remote there came the faint, faint beating of a motor engine; once, tiny as a pin-point, sound of its horn . . . Gone, and deeper and more tingling and more enormously dragging at his balance on his feet, the silence. He must pitch into it. He could not endure

again the scenes he had endured. They now, not hurtingly now, but, mysteriously, dizzyingly, seemed to be rocking him to sway him out and into the silence that stood there. The silence! Remote but sharply clear came now the detonations of a motor cycle speeding on some distant road. Tutta-tut-tut-tut; tutta-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut ——. Like pistol shots.

Pistol?

He turned and crossed four steps to where the bureau stood behind him.

At a bureau, as Charles crossed, also was occupied another. Alice in the Blackheath house was sitting at correspondence. She had a letter to write and a telegram. She had written the letter, it was to Charles. She now was about to write the telegram, to Sim, to be sent off to-morrow; and with her pencil above the pad she had opened again that cupboard and come with shock again upon that grisly form — the stark realisation, "God, am I going to run away from Charles, my husband, I?" The letter by her hand, ink not yet dry upon the envelope, was the die that very instant cast; yet new as ever, with shock and with amazement as at every previous time, starkly the realisation stood and, transfixed, the sword again was changed to globe of crystal in her hand, again she saw within its heart the phases that had brought her to the phase where now she was.

She had written in the letter: "But I grew, I cannot even to myself discover how, to love Conrad;" and her thoughts, projected by that sentence, watched by her in that crystal globe, took up their process from that point where on a day, inquiring of herself "How had it happened?", tracing the mystery from her early prejudice against, then utter indifference to, Conrad, she had brought it to that night when strangely their eyes had met,

to the morrow when, following the look, sense of restraint had been between them, to her finding in that book to which on some dim disturbing recollection she had gone the words " And the eyes of them both were opened and they knew that they were naked."

Yes, that had been it; knowledge between them of their nakedness one to another had been the cause of the restraint that then, and for days after that, had stood between herself and Conrad when they met. But how even out of that had it happened, how even from that stage had the thing grown and grown, imperceptible (in retrospect) as movement of hour-hand upon a dial; certain (in realisation) as time from noon to noon? Her mind, searching the crystal globe for answers, saw moving there the stage of reticence being sounded, as prisoners tap the wall between their cells, by here a word, there a look, here a smile, and code of intercourse at length set up; saw then and by these means the stage of reticence merge to the stage of reticence removed, of closer intercourse set up between them — notes touching the patient or touching the visits for chess when notes were not necessary; discussions, of books, of places, of events when he was there to discuss the patient's treatment only; remarks trailed off and left suspended; silences that hung and spoke more poignantly than words . . .

Playing with fire.

But how had it happened, even after that? That was the time when, sensing danger, holding on to good, she had begged Sim take up his residence with them, feeling that in his presence would be the support she felt that she would need. How had it happened? Looking back upon herself in those fire-playing days she saw the self that she was then, simple, conventional, faithful, chaste, as far from burning at that fire by being in Conrad's arms, by hearing love and speaking love, as she would

be from thrusting her hands literally into a fire's flame — and saw herself aflame, his arms about her; heard his voice, "I love you"; heard her own, "Oh, this is terrible!"; and his: "Return my kiss; say that you love me"; and hers: "I dare not say I love you"—"In French then"—"*Je t'aime, je t'aime!*"

Looking upon herself as she was then — crying even in that moment of abandonment, "This is terrible!"; crying, "I dare not, dare not"; daring in truth so little, held by her every trait and principle so surely, that only veiled in other tongue (as one who only in disguise will go to place of shame) could she declare it — looking, she saw that self as far from leaping to that fire's heart, going to dishonour's pit, rending her vows to God and Charles, fleeing with a paramour, as she would be from casting herself literally into a fire's blazing glow — and saw herself consumed in flame; waiting the sign and word and place from Conrad; now, at this moment, waiting to join him and to go with him to-morrow.

How had it happened?

The answer, long pursued, suddenly came to Alice seated there. A profound and, so to call it, very quiet meditation suddenly engrossed her. She had a sense as of the tumults and the shoutings of her emotions dying, the captains and the kings of the armies that contended within her departing, and she left all alone, in a very quiet place, with vision; and, of her vision, telling herself, very quietly:

"Alice, it was your desire to bring romance again into your life that lured you through all that and now has brought you here to this. You found romance and now you are its victim; you cannot escape it and you do not wish to escape it; you are bound to it; you would not leave it if you could. But you entered into it — do not delude yourself with sophistries of 'fate' — deliberately.

You had had romance once in your life, when by the summerhouse Charles clasped his arms about you, and dull, monotonous years had come, and Conrad presented himself and looked at you, and you had suddenly the thought of rekindling romance anew. He looked at you and you at him — and, lo, there stirred in you the thought, 'A new interest! Exciting this! alluring, rather nice, intriguing!' Restraint came between you, and your thought of that restraint was, 'This is rather lovely; fun!', and deliberately you pushed on to exploit that fun. 'Romance again! Romance re-kindled! A lover!' You only were playing with fire then, deliberately, to amuse yourself. Romance! you had recaptured it. You had gone into it deliberately and you thought, if at that time you ever gave the matter any thought, that deliberately, when you wished, you could come back out of it, put it away, return to Charles. But you could not. Romance rekindled by such as you, married, your true romance behind you, the altar of your home lit from its fires and the used brand put away as was your bridal wreath, is — changing the metaphor — a slope, no plain. You start deliberately a few delicious paces down and you presently are running, cannot stop. Alice, it was the wish to know romance again has brought you here."

She knew now; and knowing, sat and pondered it. . . .

She was thinking now, out of this vision newly hers, of her old self, of the girl, simple, conventionally minded, faithful, chaste, that in the crystal she had watched and wondered at. She did not wonder now. She understood. She was committed. She had come into this deliberately; at every turn some steeper way had urged on her descent; all was irrevocable now. But she was thinking that she saw that Alice that she once had been and she was imagining herself outstretching shielding arms about that Alice, newly married, and saying to her:

"Dear, you are married now. Romance, the true romance, has flamed about you, flames all about you now, a bride. It will not always. It will die. Dear, it is meant to die. It is a lively, lovely thing, the sweetest thing in life, but evanescent only, of no real worth, not meant for workaday. It is those first bright, leaping, sparking flames which cheerfully crackle up the sticks of newly lighted fire, but only leap and spark and gleam — and go. They have served their purpose; they have lit the fire. Dear, the fire they have lit for you is altar fire of your home, your married love. That is the fire that is lasting, workaday; that glows, not sparkles only; that comforts not excites alone; that is certain, sure and steady, come rain, come snow, come tempest, not thinly leaps and flutters and vanishes before a touch of gale. Dear, make of that altar fire of your home the happy permanence, the permanent happiness, the shining, steady glow and glory it can be: think never, never, never of repeating the romance of youth by lighting other flames. You have been through the shouting, radiant days of carrying the torches. You are promoted from the torch-bearers now: Dear, now it is the altar of your home you tend."

She moved. She had been sitting a long time. She was cold. She must go to bed. She wiped her eyes. The telegram to Sim was yet to write and she took up her pencil again and wrote it. To-morrow was the vital day for it to go and for her to go. To-morrow expired Sim's term of quarantine. If she delayed her flight Sim, released from confinement and with business perhaps to do, might come up to town and see her and she did not dare to see Sim. As it was, receiving the telegram to-morrow, he would be able to go at once to Charles and her letter to Charles she would post so that it should reach him while Sim was with him.

She drew the pad towards her and wrote her message.

Charles is at (she gave the address). Please go to him at once without moment's delay. This is the promise that you gave me to go to him when I should tell you the time had come and the time has come now. Please go immediately. Charles wants you, Sim.

But Charles did not want Sim; Charles on the threshold of the cottage of his dreams lay dead, the pistol in his rigid hand.

PART FOUR

THE GREATEST OF THESE

CHAPTER I

AS WITNESSED

In an after time — looking forward there for a moment to view perspectively matters too poignant for narrative direct — B. C. D., putting a prefatory note to a completed document, wrote:—

". . . If here and there it slips, despite me, into the story form it is because the novel is my trade and the trick of it hard to shake off; but I have tried, as I have said, to avoid it. My intention has been to set down the plain facts as I have received them from intimate sources — from Mrs. Charles Paris, from Conrad Bryne, from Linda Paris, from Elisabeth Glade, from others, from my own observations, lastly, and colouring them all the time, from the man Simon Paris — from that man Sim — himself. My intention is, as also I have said, when it comes for me to cut the painter and put out to sea, to leave this record behind me for the purpose that whoever comes to write that man's chronicle may have it, not to use in what is I am afraid and despite all my efforts my characteristic style, but to work upon and gather what he may from one who, so to speak, saw the thing as it happened, saw that man as his Purpose came to him and as he went out to his Purpose. For my own share I have this — that though in my passage here I have done no more than earn a little specious notoriety, to be shovelled back to me with the earth and left there with me when they cover me in, one small but glorious part, thrilling me whensoever I think of it, I have had in a mighty thing: It was I who gave Sim Paris that famous yellow caravan of his! It once was mine; I left it bogged in a wood and I

had it hauled out and gave it to him when his Purpose came to him; and that and no other is the caravan which he has taken through length and breadth of England as a lamp — no, the other way about — which has taken him through length and breadth of England as a lamp carried through a dark house. That is the caravan from which he gave his Purpose to the world; that the caravan from which he gave to happy hands, to all sorts and conditions of men and women, the tiny spot of purple ribbon you see now in the button-holes of half, of two thirds, of all the folk you meet. It is in Lardy Quinnet's, it is in mine; I scarcely can say more to show how wide it flies. I have seen it on the lapel of a Prince, I have seen it on the bosom of a famous musical-comedy dancer, I have seen it on a member of the Cabinet, I have seen it in the button of a burly working man — one of the Redskins as they call them now — as he came spinning out chucked from an Eastend pub: the tiny spot of ribbon, symbol, badge, that means — well, all the world knows what it means, soon I believe all will be wearing it; anyway I have told of it in its place in my record."

The record, taken up at the point where here it is pertinent goes:

". . . This was the day, remember, when first I saw him with what I have called the light upon him; the day on which, come out from standing beside his dead brother, and from, in his words to me 'the tremendous meditations which death presents to man', he first showed that light, then newly come to him, to others. He came then, as I have said, to break the news of Charles to Alice. He found her, a cab outside the door, just off apparently on a journey, a visit somewhere as he supposed.

"'Alice, you are just off somewhere?'

"'Yes, Sim. Sim, my wire, did you not get it, to go to Charles?'

"'Yes, I got that. I went. Old girl, I have something to tell you.'

"His face, his tone, forewarned her.

"'Sim — Charles? — something has happened? — an accident?'

"'Yes, an accident, Alice. Sit down, old girl. It is a little bad. Sit there. Comfy? All right? Alice, old Charles ——'

"His mouth was working; for words it should have made but could not make he made a gesture with his hand.

"'Sim! Charles is not dead?'

"'Yes, dead, old girl.'

"'Sim, Sim, Sim!'

"She lay back in her chair. She wore a flower on her breast. While a moment he stood and watched her, her hands (her eyes were closed) went slowly groping up and drew the flower out and dropped it down beside her, the hand that dropped it there remaining drooping down above it.

"He took her from the chair, he thought that she was going to faint, had fainted, and lifted her upon the sofa and knelt down on one knee beside her and spoke to her. She was not fainted. She clung to him and would not let him up —'Sim, Sim!'; no other word; clinging to him. There was something about that man that day (and ever after) that made him like a rock in tide of trouble; and she held on, 'Sim, Sim!'

"When presently he had told her, she, distraught, called to by the — the strength, the light there was about him, told him: she was running away, had been upon the point of starting, with Conrad Bryne.

"It startled him, you may suppose. All he said, the sole words that man said, smoothing back her hair upon her forehead, were 'Old girl, that is all right now.

Charles never knew that. Charles loved you and you loved Charles, that is all old Charles knows now. Old girl, that lovely love that you and old Charles had when first you loved is fresh for ever in the mind of God. God hands it back to old Charles now.'

"'Sim, Sim!'

"'Nothing of what you have told me matters now, old girl. All that is all right now.'

"'Sim, Sim, Sim!'"

He got the boxes off the cab, that man; and he went round to Conrad Bryne.

"Bryne," he said — straight off in that level voice of his, no preamble —"Bryne, this thing between my sister-in-law and you is off. She is not going, Bryne."

Straight off like that, just as I have written it, the minute Bryne came into the room to him.

Bryne — a staggering jolt for Bryne, straight into his face as he entered the room and from a man he had not seen more than twice before in his life — Bryne said — what could he say? — just "Oh!"

Sim said, "My brother Charles is dead. He shot himself."

There was a paper-knife on the table by where Bryne stood, a big ivory thing, and Bryne put his hand down to it and took it up and it broke in two within the pressure of his fingers — *crack,* and he put back the pieces on the table. "My God," he said. It was not said as an exclamation; it was just uttered solidly, very thoughtfully, as a man to whom you have suggested a day for an appointment might say ponderingly, his mind searching about among all his engagements, "Tuesday."

"My God"; then a very long silence; then "My God" again; then after long pause again, "Did he know?"

"No, he never knew."

Sim went then to go away and Bryne stood aside to let him pass, his head bowed so that his chin was on his chest. Sim stopped. Something much more than human was about that man that day (I am coming to that in a moment). As he went past Bryne, standing there head utterly bowed like that, he stopped and he said to him, "Bryne, my brother Charles was very fond of you."

I had all this, Bryne's view of it, from Bryne himself one day when we were talking of Sim. He told me that the man's pause like that and the tone in which he spoke went through him like — well, his expression to me was, "I can't tell you what it was like; all I know, B. C. D., is that when he said like that, 'Bryne, my brother Charles was very fond of you,' I stammered out of me, 'God help me, Sim — everybody calls you Sim,' I said, 'forgive me — God help me, Sim, I know he was.'"

Sim said to him, "I believe that Alice did not quite realise what she was doing. Bryne, I think that in a way you did not. Anyway, you have not done it. Your wrong that you were going to do Charles is not done. It was put away from him and put away from you and Alice too. Goodbye, Bryne."

And came away.

What gave that man the look he had, the tone he spoke? What made Alice cling to him hard with "Sim, Sim, Sim?" What made Bryne, what later made Linda, what made Andrew ——? But he came to me in my rooms that same day and for myself I saw the look about him that made these people turn to him.

He came to me on his way through to tell Andrew and to go on down again to bury his poor brother.

"I have hit some trouble, B. C. D.," he said to me, "a heap."

"By jove," I said, "I am sorry to hear it, Sim, and you know well that if there is a thing that I can do ——.

But, man, you don't look like it. Man, Sim," I said, "there is a look about you as if ——"; and there I stopped, stuck fast, starkly astonished, by the look that there was.

There was a light in his face!

But there was much more than that. Thousands who have seen him have said that there is a light in his face but it is an expression which to one who never has seen him might mean a hundred things and yet never the right one. I say of it that the reaction I had to him in that moment as he stood there was that for the first time in my life I was looking upon a man who was in perfect *balance*. I mean physical balance; I mean poised, poised absolutely and perfectly, on the precise balancing point of his heels and of the ball of his feet; I mean balanced above that on the plumb pivot of his knees, and above that on hips and loins, and above that on chest and neck, and holding on his face the perfect apex and apotheosis of it all — a light, a steady, ready, level light, held up in perfect equipoise.

That is what I saw; and seeing it, astounded at it, I said to him, staring at him, "What has happened to you, Sim? I don't mean your trouble; I mean the look of you. Man," I said, "you ——"; and stuck for words again.

He told me that he had found something.

"But, Sim," I said. I still was staring at the man, bewildered at him. "But, man, Sim, what the dickens is it you have found that has put this, dash it, this wonder in your face?"

He said to me: "B. C. D., I have found that for which men have been looking ever since the war; good God, by which, if they had found it before, there would have been no war."

And he told me what it was — his Purpose, the thing

for which for years he had believed himself selected, set aside; he had found it and he told me what it was.

I was the first he ever told it to! I!

I have in his own hand the first pages of the first draft he wrote of it; and since writing it was his first intention, and since this my record is a chronology, it is best, I think, that I should insert it a little later at the point of time when it was written.

He talked to me after that, I filled with new wonder and hearing with new ears, about his brother. He was terribly cut up about his brother. I remember a thing he said and it is a thing I think should be preserved.

"B. C. D.," he said, "one thinks of one's dead — I think of the dead, my Mother, and bitterly repine the past; the opportunities neglected, the slights, the hurts; the things committed and the things omitted, the things that were, the things that might have been, and wish to God I had her here again to live the past with her again. What happens? Now my brother dies and I cry out to him the same tempestuous regrets, the selfsame desolation of my grief. 'Mother, if I had the chance again!' I cry; 'Old man, if you were here again!' I cry. And, B. C. D., I have the chance, I have the time again. Not with the dead; they are gone; with the living, B. C. D., who are here. One thinks of the dead; one forgets the living — that is the dreadful error that one makes. One thinks of what one would have done, neglects the things one now can do, until, again — too late! All, every single thing, one would have done for those now gone one still and now can do for those who still and now are here; with me, my brother who is left to me, my sisters who are left to me. B. C. D., we cannot have the dead back nor live last year again; but we have the living and we have, for their endearment, this year and all the years that start today."

B. C. D. in his record has a deal to say here of points at which Sim's life had been touched by his brothers, by Alice and by Linda. Already related, they here may be omitted; he is writing, however, at some considerable time after the events and his note of one small occurrence relating to those events may be extracted:

"Reverting (he says) to the situation at Blackheath as Sim found it, I may add here a thing touching it which was told me long afterwards by Conrad Bryne at the time when I had come to know all these people very intimately. How precisely it touched that situation I never exactly knew, but we had got somehow, Bryne and I, on to the subject of whether interest could legally be added to an ordinary debt and Bryne, telling me that he never but once had had to settle a debt and that then he added interest to it —'compound' said he, 'and yet without the passing of any coin whatever,'— told me incidentally that it related very closely to that unhappy time when Sim came around to see him after poor Charles's death. There was a sum of money, a big sum, due apparently to a man called Jule. 'I took on the settlement of that,' Bryne told me. 'I wrote to this Jule and told him to come down and see me about it and I saw him and I paid him, principal *and* interest.'

"'But how,' I asked, 'without passing of coin?'

"'I paid him,' Bryne said, 'with my own hand — in stripes.' The recollection appeared to give him uncommon satisfaction."

Resumed where pertinent, the record made by B. C. D. continues:—

". . . He went straight on from me to see Andrew and to see Elisabeth Glade. To these he had telephoned making appointment from Blackheath; but Elisabeth, attending Miss Andiron, had the doctor meeting a specialist for a consultation at the hour he could have got to her,

and Andrew, gone with Lord Staverton to some works in Essex, was not expected back at his house till an hour or so after the time Elisabeth hoped to be free to see him. This was why he had looked in on me first and why he went on from me to Elisabeth, the news of Charles's death to be broken to Andrew after that. He had already, on the telephone, told Elisabeth, and at his arrival she opened the door of the room where he was with the condolences she had already given him anew on her lips. But they were not the first words she spoke. Immediately she saw him she was caught up ('transfixed' was the word she used to me) by his appearance as I had been caught up, and her first and immediate words (she knew of course much more than I had known) were 'Sim, you have found your Purpose!'

"He smiled at her (I can imagine that smile), 'Yes, Elisabeth.'

"Through her working for me I had known Elisabeth a long time and knew her very well. She released herself from Miss Andiron for a snatched half-hour the following day and came to see me and intimately as I had known her I knew her very much more intimately after that. Sim was what she had come to talk to me and Sim was that which all the time we talked. 'Balanced,' I told her, telling her of my reaction to the astonishing look of him—'a man whose every thought and cell and fibre was perfectly in his control, poised, perfectly adjusted;' and she agreed: 'Yes, yes; that is better than mine,' she said. 'Tuned was the word that came to me; I somehow had the feeling, that instant when I saw him, of an instrument perfectly toned that would give the perfect note whatever chord of it was touched;' and it was mine to join assent to that: 'Yes, tuned, toned, you have it there,' I said; 'that was the look of him—a man in perfect tune.'

" She had it even better, I think she had it finally, in her next words; ' In tune with the Christ within him,' she said.

" It took us immediately, that phrase, to the thing that had given him his look — the revelation to him that Christ is in every man and woman; and when we had spoken of the wonder of that knowledge, its wonderful simplicity, its simple wonder, and of how each of us, since he told us, had tested it (in the same way!) and proved it and had had the wonder that comes of testing it and proving it — when we had spoken of that, ' What is he going to do?' I asked her. ' How is he going to set about it, to deliver it? I mean how is he going to ——?'

" She gave me the right term. ' To carry out his Purpose,' she said.

" ' Of course! Elisabeth, this is of the age of signs and wonders this that you have told me of him feeling himself selected for a Purpose like that, and waiting for it, and now being revealed it. Yes, how does he think to carry out his Purpose?'

" She told me that the revelation had only been with him a few hours when she saw him, and that there was poor Charles lying dead in his cottage on the downs, and the news to be broken to Andrew, and Andrew to be told, too, all of Linda, for this would be the first time since Sim's release from quarantine that he would have seen Andrew — but that, in so far as all these stresses had given him time to shape his mind, his idea was to return to Old Ballard's and write his discovery, his message, his positive faith that will satisfy, as a book and publish it. That seemed to him, she told me, the clearest way."

The record may be set aside; Sim in his direct progress taken up again.

CHAPTER II

THE WARNING

Andrew, out of town, had not been told on the telephone as had Elisabeth, of Charles's tragedy. He had been told on his return to his house of the message that Sim was coming to see him, and, arrived not five minutes in front of Sim, it was of Linda only, from Sim who had been last to see her, that he was expecting to hear. Expecting it, avidly awaiting it, Andrew had neither eyes nor ears for other thing. When he saw Sim he saw at once, as B. C. D. and as Elisabeth had seen, a change in him. He made no comment on it. This was Duke Paris to whom, as B. C. D. might have said, Sim now showed his light and it was to take another event, then yet to come, to penetrate the armour that Duke Paris wore and to cause him to turn to Sim as Alice and as Conrad Bryne had turned. Little more than the least comment Andrew made, too, on hearing of the tragedy of Charles. His mind ever since the news had come to him of Linda's removal to the hospital had been charged to the exclusion of all else with Linda; he daily received report of her condition and daily by these reports his mind was charged with her anew; this appearance — at last — of Sim who had been there when she was taken ill was an event for which daily his mind had ravened (that is the word) and his mind, overcharged, ravening, beneath one stimulus, had little to offer that was sensitive to prick of another.

Sim came in to him in the study and he turned swiftly round from his desk. Now!

"Niggs, old man, how goes it?"

The old greeting.

" Oh, pretty good, Sim."

The old response.

But Duke Paris had not with it the old quick-flashed but perceptible and meaning smile. His mind was in concern too deep for signals from his heart.

" Sim, I have been wanting you like hell, like hell. Tell me from the beginning ——"

" Old man, I have something else to tell you first. Old Charles ——."

He told him.

Andrew's face did not change. If it showed anything it showed, while he listened, impatience. More as one rebuffed than as one shaken he turned away when Sim had done and with no comment paced the room. Sim watched him. One never knew quite how a thing was taken by Andrew. Presently, while he still paced, he said, " Bad, bad! "; and presently again, speaking as if solely for his own hearing and not at all for Sim's, " What a thing to happen; Charles; good God! "

Then he stopped suddenly in his striding and swung right around upon Sim. " Sim, tell me everything about Linda."

Standing precisely where he had swung around, making no movement, giving no sign, he listened while he was told. Sim described the premonitory stages of Linda's sickness, its onset, his fetching of the doctor, her removal to the hospital, his idea (as he put it) that she had contracted the infection while perhaps calling at some cottage in the course of a ramble. He said nothing yet of her financial troubles which in this the advantage of the compassion Andrew must have for her plight he had determined sympathetically to place before him; the Toridd Lesson business, equally he had determined, was never for Andrew's hearing.

To all that he heard Andrew listened without question, without comment. He had said that to learn Sim's news he had been wanting to see him "like hell"; but his manner of receiving it, unmoved, unmoving, impassive, inscrutable, was that of a judge receiving from counsel the statement of a case, and when it was done it was Sim and not he who spoke again.

"How is she doing, Niggs? The last I heard was that she was in the secondary fever, as they call it, and the condition grave of course but thank God not too grave. I came away today before I got the report they have been sending me. Have you had yours?"

Andrew moved then, taking from his table that day's report and handing it to Sim. It had the phrase "But continuing on the whole to run a normal course," and Sim caught at that and expressed his relief in it. He handed back the paper. "Poor Linda! And, Niggs, old man, poor you. This is terrible for you, Niggs."

"It is bad," Andrew said.

It was his sole contribution to the debate. He had out his car then and went down with Sim to look upon his brother, the body, abandoned of its spirit, of that poor Charles awaiting, mute and indifferent, the passage of ensuing days which, as the passage of a tide, obliterates the dead, bears on, and bears to other scenes, those who yet swim upon the flood.

It is a swift tide; few days to cover out of sight what has for years stood up as life, few days to dissipate memorials a lifetime has erected. There was an inquest, a funeral, a return, the settling by Sim of Alice's affairs, her return widow to her mother's house in Sussex which she had left as bride — all done then, life to be taken up again where life had seemed to be, but was not, stopped. The churchyard of the parish in which stood the cottage of Charles's dreams lay, as the cottage, in a

fold of the downs and at Alice's appeal there was laid Charles. "Sim, if you had heard him talk of the fold in the downs! That is where his spirit was; Sim, that is where his spirit will love to see his body rest."

She put a belt of his in his coffin beside him; she brought back with her, carried in her hands, not wrapped up, a pair of new-soled, golf-spiked shoes.

All done; the waters closed about the dead, the hazard of the waters to be sought again by those the dead in dying had brought to anchor.

"It is bad;" that sole pronouncement of Andrew's on the case of Linda hung like the solemn note of warning bell in all his further reference to her while in these occasions Sim was in daily touch with him. Reports of her took first an encouraging, then as the period of the secondary fever passed, an assured note; days drew on towards the time, if all continued well, of her release; and Sim, on these outcomes, took his felicitations daily with glad face to his brother. Andrew received all, and twice when news was bad received that, with the same judge-like mien, impassive, immobile, that had received Sim's first account. He thought, it was perfectly clear to Sim, of nothing else but Linda; but what he thought, how stood towards her that mind charged with her to the exclusion of all else, only the reverberations of that warning "It is bad" gave signal. Sim had misgivings but he put them from him. He knew Andrew. This austere, grave and unemotional, uncommunicative man, this veritable Duke Paris, was much more, he told himself, the real Andrew than the Andrew head of and participant in the costly, luxurious way of life that had been so surprising when first seen in Mayfair Street; and beneath that veritable Duke was always, Sim equally knew, "Old Niggs."

Relying on this estimate, assured that trouble for Linda

best might be assuaged while compassion for her might be its counsel, he opened the subject of her debts, representing them as the mere careless accumulation of frivolities that easily could have been settled as they arose, and, encouraged by no emotion in Andrew other than the impassive attitude of all these days, proceeded and laid bare in total the figure at which they stood.

"Of course," he said, reaching this point, "it has amounted to a goodish lump, running on in that light-hearted, irresponsible way of hers. You will not mind that, Niggs."

He had asked the question before in the course of his statement; his repetition of it now was in demand of a stronger affirmation that the situation would not be "minded" and he received it.

"I absolutely do not mind," Andrew said.

"Good old Niggs; I knew you would not. It goes up on the three figure notch, the thousands."

"I absolutely do not mind."

"Eight."

"I absolutely do not mind;" but Duke Paris added this time other words. "It will be merely the closing of an account. When she returns there will be no more of that."

Sim cried, "I am sure there will not."

Andrew said, "She will be different."

The voice was voice of "It is bad"; the solemn warning of that warning bell again.

CHAPTER III

THE SUMMONS

"A FAITH that would satisfy." Sim had found it; it had been revealed to him; and his Purpose, disclosed to him at last, was, he knew instinctively and with no shade of doubt, to reveal it to his fellows. This was that for which, while in the world-war millions fell, he, in the heart of it, had been spared; this was that towards which ever since the war, insensibly but surely, he had been advancing. Clearly he could see as he looked back how sure, with what infallible progression stage by stage, and yet how unknown to himself, had been his preparation. He had felt dissatisfaction with all that in his accustomed way of life formerly had more than satisfied him, and he had left the army. He had felt a longing to find some sympathetic understanding to which he could confide the impulses that caused him to leave, and finding none had thought how universal was that need for sympathy, and realising that, had had his mind set in trains never before explored by him. He had gone amongst the labouring masses and their employers and had come from them with those feelings, outraging Andrew, of hearts taken away from brother-men when offices were closed. Strangely uneasy in those days, constantly remembering, and resentful of, that "Of God" of Elisabeth's, "I have the odd, uncanny feeling," he had written to her, "that God is *after* me"— and he had come to Old Ballard's and on his first night there been given for his text "One Simon, him they compelled to bear His cross." There had followed that ride home that evening when that light was

in the sky; his involuntary cry, forced out of him, to God; his utter peace received by him when "If I am shown herein my purpose and know that purpose thine . . . if, as with Saul . . . summons . . . if, as with Simon . . . to bear thy cross . . . If these, O God, suffer me some truth that I can understand," he had prayed. And then had followed K.O.H.; and then beside the exquisite tranquillity of Old Gand's sanctuary in death the revelation that that Kingdom of Heaven was not in a heaven remote, inaccessible, mysteriously beyond a man's conception, but here in the heart of every human soul that breathed. And now ——

Plain as a mountain path ascended and looked back upon, he saw the way that he had come; clear as the prospect set before the climber who has gained, at last, the summit, he saw the truth to which at last he had been brought.

He was writing it.

"A faith that would satisfy." Back at Old Ballard's, settled down to eager engagement upon delivery of that faith to the world by the clear means of writing it just as it had come to him, it was strange to him how, as eagerly he proceeded with it, constantly and insistently there would come between his knowledge and the words in which he sought to put it that warning sound, like solemn warning of a bell, of Andrew's words of Linda: "It is bad;" "She will be different." The message that he had to tell, uplifting his heart, uplifting his mind, uplifting his very body to that perfect poise and balance which all who saw him marked, glowed within him with the tingle, and with much more, of perfect health of athlete keyed to final pitch before his trial; there were days when, with the Psalmist, he could have shouted in sheer triumph of the glory that he knew. Yet curiously,

disconcertingly, coming often at moments when his pen was flowing easiest and best, would come the feeling of a doubt; not a doubt that had form and shape and that therefore he could examine and determine, but a doubt, amorphous and without body, at which, laying down his pen, he would stare with his mental eyes as one who gazed at smudge upon the sea horizon and wondered if it should be land or only cloud or smoke; and always, curiously, his brooding out towards that doubt would merge to brooding on that warning note in Andrew's voice, that stroke upon a solemn bell, "It is bad;" "She will be different."

News came from Linda and his engagement by these troubled thoughts increased. The day of her discharge from the hospital arrived and on its morning he arose to go, though in her letter she had not invited him, to bring her away and, if she should wish, to take her up to Andrew. But he did not go. When he came downstairs was a letter from her written from Mayfair Street telling him that she had returned that day and asking his forgiveness for the small trick she had played upon him. "I told you the wrong day because I knew that you would wish to come to me and after all I have been through I somehow could not bear to see you straight at the door as I came out. Forgive me, please, Sim." She added that a nurse had brought her up; she said no word of how she was or felt; no word of pleasure at being home again; no word of Andrew. Where, disappointed, troubled, that warning bell within his ears, he noted the absence of these informations, he read in their place: "Do not come up just yet, Sim: I do not feel very much like seeing anyone just yet; I will write to you."

She did not write.

He answered her letter, writing gaily, though in all that concerned her, dubious before, he now felt more than

dubious, far from gay. She did not reply. He let time run and wrote again, more time and other letters. She answered, when she did answer, briefly, non-committally; her letters ghosts, nay in their arid irresponsiveness, skeletons of the gay chatters he had had from her of old. Always was the plea, "Do not come up yet, Sim;" never was answer to his questions; to Andrew reference never. He had been certain, and he kept on pressing it, that she would go away with Andrew on recuperation, a voyage, the seaside, the country. The best he ever got to this was "Soon perhaps; but I am not up to it just as yet; I prefer just to be here."

And now, curiously again, the sequence of the hindrance that often came to lie upon his work was changed. At first had been that odd feeling of a doubt that he was doing it rightly, and out of the doubt had merged, as if that cloud on the horizon, stared at, took shape, the thoughts, struck on that warning note, of Linda and of Andrew. Now always his mind was turning directly to that warning sound, reverberating now in all her letters and in all her silences, and it would drift from it to his writing and he would find his thoughts upon his writing hung over by that cloudy doubt which formerly had come straight from engagement on the work itself.

He began to have the feeling, and once it had assumed that shape increasingly it filled it, that, easily though his pen seemed to run, ardently though the knowledge that he had tingled and uplifted him, it was not in this written form that he was called to present it.

He was disturbed.

Had he gone astray somewhere? he asked himself — set out the body, perhaps, and missed the spirit; presented his own conviction but failed to present conviction to whom should read? Disturbed, he began, instead of writing onwards, to read back, piece by piece weighing what

he had written, paragraph by paragraph searching the flaw. He could find no flaw. He had written out of his heart.

But the doubt grew.

He was sitting one day pondering it, his mind between it and his troubled thoughts of Linda, when there happened that which was to be the lamp to show his doubt in actual form, the light by which he should have grace and courage to resolve it. He had not an idea when it happened that out of it clarity of that kind was to come: what happened was that, sitting before his table deep in thought, he looked up at a sound and saw Linda.

"Sim!"

"Linda!"

She wore a heavy veil; he could not see her face. But he would have known her form anywhere; and as she stood there he was telling himself that if he had passed her in a street he would not have recognized her form. He questioned her and she answered him, telling him how she had come, and he would have said that he would have known her voice anywhere. But as he listened to her he was telling himself that if, concealed from him she had been overheard by him, he would not have recognized her voice. She was changed. She was utterly and she was dreadfully different. He had known her the figure, shaped like a lovely fairy, plumed like a lovely bird, that in a thousand stood out for hers alone; he saw her now in black, and shapeless black, and she seemed shorter, shrunken, a veiled and negligible entity who might have twice the years of Linda and carried them on nerveless knees; he had heard the voice, piped with the pipes of laughter, tuned with the fork of glee, that in a thousand rang for hers alone; he heard her now in tones thin, lifeless, having a dry, metallic sound.

"Am I changed, Sim?"

She had been telling him that she was going by road — through the window he could see Andrew's big touring car outside — to stay with a married sister down in Somerset; had no idea of calling here; had found the road lay through Westchurch and could not forbear to turn aside and see him — for ten minutes only, else darkness would have fallen before she made her point. Now she seemed come to end of that, and he, recovering a little from his first shock and grief at what he saw, had said, "But, Linda, Linda, before all this there is such heaps I want to hear. This is the first time I have seen you ——."

"Am I changed, Sim?"

He tried for the old gay way between them. "Why, not in asking impossibles, anyway. How on earth can I tell if you are changed? Veiled, muffled, you don't let me see a thing of you and then you ask me ——."

She put her hands to her veil and raised it. "Look, Sim," she said; nothing more; just "Look, Sim", and disclosed to him what he had known to be the loveliest face he ever saw.

"Look, Sim."

He could have caught his breath, but he repressed himself; but what his eyes, what his hand, despite himself, caught swiftly to his breast, told, he could not disguise. He was shocked utterly, and he knew that she knew that he was shocked. His heart, as with sudden rush of blood, filled up and felt to burst with pity and with love for her, and he knew that she knew that his heart was filled. He was her greatest friend on earth and he knew that she knew him for her greatest friend.

"Oh, my poor Linda," he said and opened his arms towards her.

She ran into his arms and threw her own about him,

and he held her strongly, strongly to him and she sobbed and sobbed and sobbed . . .

She was telling him presently all that within the sounding of that warning bell he had felt, all that at her arrival in this manner he had feared, all that when she removed her veil and then lay sobbing, clinging, in his arms he had known. "Andrew" was what she told him. It was the first word of her disclosure. It was the only word she need have said if he had needed confirmation of his fears. It is the only word that needs here to be written to publish all she told.

"Andrew . . ."

She was gone presently; nothing — no earnestness of pitying and devoted love, no simulated jolly bantering appeal to stay and resume here, if a day only, the jolly time that they had before — would prevail on her to stay. She gave him when, from her abandonment in telling him all that was summarised in "Andrew", she was back into herself (her piteous new self) the impression of a sorely wounded creature, sick unto death, eager alone to flee away to darkness, to shelter, to which she had set her mind to go; and presently was gone; and he was left with picture of all that by "Andrew" had been presented to him.

"It is bad." Andrew had not meant, pityingly, that her plight was bad: it was the prospect on which he looked he meant was bad: prospect of revulsion by her as she might be returned to him of those senses which had been ravished by her as she used to be. "She will be different:" he had not meant, pityingly, that by suffering her nature would be different now: it was her lovely self which, ravished, he had decked and cherished, that he meant would be different and that he dreaded different to see.

"It is bad:" "She will be different:" and in that

piteous "Andrew" was left with Sim the picture of the badness and of the difference that now had come to be — of Andrew with permanently on his face that brooding look with which at seasons, studying her across their costly table, across a gleaming dancing-floor, he had been wont to watch her; of her with now no radiant smile from a bewitching face to witch that look away; of Andrew with sex-attraction done, gone to revulsion now by that marred effigy to which before his eyes his lovely prey was turned; of her, who in the mirror of his face ever had seen herself in ravishment reflected, raising entreating eyes to see now, mirrored there disfavour cold, changeless, unconcealed.

He turned to his writing. He found in it in the days that followed new body in the doubts which, strangely merging out of troubled thought on Linda, had begun to disturb his satisfaction in it. Anew, had he gone astray in it, he asked himself, presented his own conviction but failed to present conviction to whom should read? But he now probed further. Was it not in this form as he was writing it that he was called upon to present it? What other way, he began to ask himself, could be? He could write it, he felt, in no other way than this in which as far as he had carried it it stood beneath his hand; what other method than that of writing it could there be for its dispersal? By telling it?

Involuntarily he was caused by the mere passage across his mind of that idea to make a strongly negative motion of his head. Visioning it, not even remotely as a telling by public preaching, but solely in the strict limitation of moving about amongst and telling to his friends, it was an alternative to writing from which he shrunk utterly and with every fibre of his mentality. He had told B. C. D., he had told Elisabeth; but they were different. Elisa-

beth was as his other self. The very outset of his acquaintance with B. C. D., back in the war when he was receiving Elisabeth's revealing letters, had been in veins that made disclosure to him easy. But to tell others! Why, so utterly he shrunk from in his own personality dealing of things religious that the very book when it was written he proposed to publish anonymously. How tell it then? — and why?

On a day of these his new doubts and surmises he had carried his thoughts for the first time from that "How?" to that "Why?", and deeply was engaged with it — "Why should I tell it with my own lips?"— when a voice behind him broke in on him: "Is there an answer, sir?"

He knew the voice for Margaret Yeoman's. Bemused, he laughed a little ruefully and said bemusedly, "Why, that is just what I would like to know, Margaret. What is it, a note, from whom?" and turned towards her.

"A telegram, sir."

He took it. It was signed "Doctor in Attendance." It read: "Mrs. Andrew Paris lies very gravely ill and is asking for you. Hasten."

CHAPTER IV

THE PRAYER

"HASTEN."

O sinister and portentous word!

Through the interminable hours of the long cross-country railway travel to where she lay — two hours after the news before even a start could be made; all the journey then barriered by changes and delays —"Hasten" in regular and sonorous beat, like solemn tolling of a funeral bell, smote on his mind and into all his thoughts. "Hasten." His mind conjectured, visioned, at wayside stations in impotence of action writhed; across each surmise of her plight, across each picture of her circumstance, across each tumult of his impotence, struck, and hung echoing till it struck again, "Hasten."

Strange how the sound as of a bell persistently had imaged in his thoughts since last he was in the train, bound then to settle down to accomplishment of his Purpose by writing it as it had come to him. "It is bad;" "She will be different:" a bell-buoy swinging as in muffled warning with the tides had overhung his work with fogging doubts. "Hasten," a church bell tolling on the note of doom, now caused it to be laid aside and took him from it. Strange? There grew upon him as his journey crawled its dragging way conviction that it was much more than strange; it was significant. "Hasten." He had delayed. Here in the message that he had to tell, but had not told, was that which if Linda, "gravely ill", lay dying, would have been arms about her in the valley of the shadow she must face; here, had Andrew known it, was that which would have opened in him other vision

than those cold disfavoured eyes which he had set upon her in the pitiable days which she had lived with him. "Hasten." He might have told. He had shrunk from telling. "Why," he had asked himself, "should I tell when much more easily I can write?"

The rhythm of the train said "Hasten"; the answer that it gave him was, "You have delayed, you are delaying, to make your message known."

It was night, after ten o'clock, when at last he came to her. He had had surprise in the signature of the telegram. "Doctor in Attendance"— curious that the married sister with whom she was had not sent the message. He found it explained when he arrived. She was not with a married sister nor with any relative. The refuge, the hiding-place, to which she had fled was home of an old nurse of her family's who, as he now was told by the woman, had helped bring her into the world, conducted her childhood, seen her married, now ——. The woman wiped her eyes; yes, the doctor was here, had just come down, was in the sitting-room.

"I will tell you this," the doctor was saying to him — he was a very big man, cleanshaven, his hair perfect white but his face unlined and, intensified by this not usual combination, of expression singularly kind. He held Sim's hand for some moments when he first took it and he spoke throughout as if he were a very old, much concerned, friend. "I will tell you this, that when you ask me what is wrong I would say to you, if she were a normal case, that there is very little wrong. She is very far from normal."

"I know that," Sim said. "You know all that she has been through?"

"I know what her body has been through, not her mind."

Sim looked at him: "Terrible things."

The Doctor nodded gravely. "It is clear; and because of them she is"—he seemed to pause for a deliberate word and then to find it—"foundering."

Sim said: "Sinking? Do you mean dying?"

The doctor put out a hand and made a slow downward motion with it. "I mean just slipping away — steadily. Except in consumption, in a consumptive decline, I have never seen the like of it. She took to her bed, they tell me, directly she got here and old Mrs. King — a good body that — at last called me in. She had contracted a chill, severe, yes, but to be thrown off in any normal case. She simply has been unable to throw it off. Her power of resistance is simply — gone. She has no power. Whatever it is that she has been through — terrible things, you say — they have taken effort right out of her. Taken everything, courage, hope, will, everything, right out of her. She has come right to the end. She has given up. She has done."

"Do you tell me," Sim began, and to steady his voice had need to stop. Formed by conjunction of what he knew with what he now was told he had a vision of her — utterly done, all lost, more dead than stone to Andrew, nothing for which to live — that shook the words that he would utter. "Do you tell me that she is dying?"

"It was necessary to tell you 'hasten'."

"Mrs. King tells me my brother, her husband, is arriving by the midnight train. If she is so ill — dying ——."

"It was impossible to learn from her before the address of any friends. She would send for no one."

Again, more poignantly yet, he had that vision of her, all lost, desirous only to hide away. "Does she know how ill she is?"

"It was necessary, to get the addresses, to tell her."

Sim had not removed the great coat in which he had

arrived. He took it off. "I will go to her," he said. "Will you tell me how long you give ——."

"I asked myself how long before I sent that telegram," the doctor said; "and then I added 'hasten' to it. You know how they say that a foundering ship goes; at the end — suddenly." He paused. He said gravely, "She is at the end."

Sim went slowly to the door.

"I shall not come again tonight," the doctor said. "The telephone is by my bed and I am within ten minutes. Early tomorrow morning ——" He took Sim's hand and held it.

"You had a consultation here this afternoon, Mrs. King tells me," Sim said. "If there is any other opinion — if there is anything that can be done."

"I think nothing — but hope. I do not believe that skill can do anything. It is not a case for skill."

"What hope can there be then?"

The doctor regarded him meaningly. "You know more than I do, her husband perhaps more, of what her trouble has been." He made again that slow descending motion with his hand; this time he passed his other hand beneath it checking its descent. "If it should be in your power, in your brother's power, to interpose — what shall I call it? — a rescue relief as I interpose this hand beneath my sinking hand; I would call that hope."

"I will go to her," Sim said.

She was lying in presentation of abandonment, utter, profound, retaining scarcely breath itself, such as he never would have thought could be and yet be life. Her arms, stretched before her on the coverlet, had the palms of her hands turned upward, the fingers slightly curved, as though she offered, and had had taken from them, all they had ever held; there was no smallest movement of her

breast; her face, eyes closed, mouth drooped, lay with forlorn suggestion of flower drooped to earth, the picture of ineffable fatigue.

A nurse stood by her looking down upon her.

Sim, noiselessly entered through the open door, went forward. The nurse, upright, absorbed, immobile, benignity in statue done in blue and white, seeming no more to breathe than breathed that effigy, recumbent, of weariness outworn, did not hear him. He stopped, and stood there, his perceptions strung. Without this shadowed room, no sound, no stir, that held about the bed that pool of light in which those figures were, was there a world that teemed and trafficked, warred, feasted, bartered, joyed? It could not be believed. There was; and she had known and loved and led that world and now lay here in utter weariness upon the bed, one that the noisy world had used and crushed and done with and now had flung here very tired and had withdrawn from and had left. Lines came to him that B. C. D. had told him: —

> Strew on her roses, roses,
> And never a spray of yew;
> In quiet she reposes . . .
> Her mirth the world required;
> She bathed it in smiles of glee.
> But her heart was tired, tired,
> And now they let her be.

Could he speak? His throat felt filled.

He went forward and came within the pool of light before the nurse, the bed between them.

The nurse looked up and faintly smiled.

He whispered, "Asleep?"

"I think not. She never really sleeps. She just lies on like that, day and night."

" Shall I speak to her? "

The nurse stooped down and smoothed the forehead on the pillow. " Someone has come to see you."

There was a sigh, scarcely to be heard.

Sim said, " Linda, I have come to see you — Sim. Here is old Sim, Linda."

Again the sigh.

Sim went on one knee. The nurse said, " Perhaps you would like to ——" and made motion of going, and Sim nodded, and she said, " You have only to call," and was gone.

" Darling old girl, here is old Sim again."

Her eyelids very slowly lifted and she looked at him and wearily they fell again.

" We seem to be always meeting in some new place, old girl. We can't keep apart, can we? "

She murmured: " Little Sim boy."

He turned his head to wipe his eyes.

" Talk to me, Sim."

" I have come down to find out why it is you have popped off to bed again. I am going to have you out and make you well again."

" I am so tired."

" Darling Linda, I know you are. I think I will not talk — just sit and play at holding hands."

" Sim, so tired, tired."

" Sleep while Sim holds your hand."

" Talk to me, Sim."

He was there for what seemed to him a very long time, talking, very softly, in sentences beginning " Do you remember? " that called up jolly times that they had had together. He could think no other subject. He wanted very much to tell her that Andrew soon would come. He feared to mention Andrew, and did not. He wanted desperately to speak to her some sacred comfort — all that

he might have told her when she came to see him but had not — and knew, and bitterly reproached himself, he had left that too late, and did not.

She lay all the time, eyes closed, responding nothing.

He grew afraid.

Afraid, anxiously watching her, he was thinking to call the nurse when suddenly she opened her eyes wide.

"Sim."

"Linda, yes?"

"Tell me some good stuff, Sim."

"Linda — good stuff?"

Her eyes were drooping down again. "Sim, tell me some good stuff."

Good stuff! His heart was rent. It was the very phrase —airy, irreverent — that in her lovely gay and thoughtless days she would have used for what, when she repeated it, he knew at once she meant. Good stuff — he could have told it her abundantly and, lacking courage, had denied it her; and now with what perhaps should be her closing breath she sought it of him.

"Sim, tell me some good stuff."

What could he tell her now? "Darling Linda, a prayer?"

"Sim . . . Sim."

He said, "Listen, then, darling Linda:

> "Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
> The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide."

She sighed.

"Listen, then, darling Linda:

> "When other helpers fail and comforts flee
> Help of the helpless, O abide with me."

Her murmur came: "Hand, Sim."

He took a hand of hers in both of his.

"Hold thou thy cross . . ."

His voice shook. He was forced to stop.

"Hand, Sim, hand."

"Darling, I am holding your hand; Sim has your hand. Listen, Linda darling:

"Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies . . ."

She sighed.

He could not go on. He tried to summon his voice and he began again "Hold thou thy cross . . .", and could not, and at some sound across the room looked up and at the door saw Andrew standing there.

The face that Andrew showed was face of one in dire pain; the face he saw on Sim was face convulsed in grief. Andrew put a finger to his lips, and mutely, in bitter pain, in bitter grief, the brothers looked one on the other.

There were sounds then upon the stairs and in a moment the nurse came past Andrew and came, a cup in hand, towards the bed. Andrew beckoned then to Sim and Sim got up and went to him.

Across the passage a door stood open. They went in there and Andrew closed the door.

"Sim, can't you kill me?"

As one that casts away his coat to save a drowning man, Sim cast away his grief to save this brother. He was seen of Andrew then as B. C. D., as Elisabeth, had seen him — balanced, a light held up in perfect equipoise upon his face; he was felt, his hands on Andrew's arms, steadying him; he was heard "Niggs; Niggs, old man!"

"Sim, can't you kill me?"

"Niggs, old man, play the man."

"Sim, I have played the blackest hell. This is my judgment. Sim, will she die?"

" It stands with God, old man."

His brother said between his teeth: " If then God punishes — do you know how I have treated her? "

" I know a bit. Niggs, why did you not come to her while you stood there? "

" How could I dare? Sim, you say you know a bit of how I treated her. Before God, I never thought of death. Before God, now I see death coming to her to take her — I shall kill myself, Sim. I cannot live without her."

" How long were you there, Niggs? "

" When she said, ' Tell me some good stuff.' "

Duke Paris put his hands before his eyes and pressed them there. He cast them down and cried, as though with their casting back he broke loose a hope. " Sim, you told her good stuff. Sim, you can pray. For God's sake, pray, Sim."

" Niggs, I am praying, praying every moment, Niggs, old man."

" Sim, can prayer bring miracles? Pray for a miracle, Sim. Sim, pray — pray Christ to come into that room ——"

Sim said, " Niggs, Christ will. Listen to me, Niggs, old man. Let me talk my own way. This is life and death and I must say things as I feel them. Love casteth out death. Go in and cast out death with love. You ask for Christ. Niggs, Christ goes in with you when you go in. He does. Christ is in you, Niggs; Niggs, in *you.* Listen, the other day this happened to me. I was told into my heart; into my soul the knowledge was given to me, that Christ ——"

Not as in haste, in stumbling words, he told it then; but as the first pages of his written draft unfold it the subject of his Purpose now may stand.

CHAPTER V

THE INCREASING PURPOSE

He writes:—

"This is the religious satisfaction that I have found, satisfaction utter and assured of that hunger for a positive faith that will satisfy which is in all men everywhere to-day, and this is how, suddenly, mysteriously, and at a moment when I was not thinking of such things, it came to me.

"I was walking in a wood near my cottage along a grassy drive which since the first day I happened upon it I had always called my Mother's walk because it recalled exactly the place in which we walked together one very early spring and in which she took off her gloves and felt the lovely softness of the first tiny leaves and buds as I found them for her. She and I never forgot that walk and for years after would speak of it, and when I found this place so very like it I named it at once hers, and always when I entered it had the strong feeling, the knowledge, that she was entered with me, and always drew her attention (just as to her actual presence I had done those many years ago) to the things in it she would have loved to see.

"This I was as usual doing on the day there happened to me the thing I am now about to tell; and thus, though I have said that I was not thinking of religious things, it is to be granted that I was in tune with, was attuned to communion with, sacred things, because when my mother (in spirit) is with me, I know that the spiritual

side of me is quick within me, lively and living, and my material side in abeyance, out of action, temporarily dead.

" Well, then, I had been thinking of her, delighting my eyes on this and this and this of nature's lovely treasury spread along my way, and saying in my heart, ' Look, mother; touch this, mother '; but in the moment I now come to I was not actively thinking of her; I was not consciously thinking of anything; my mind was empty; and suddenly in my mind was this extraordinary sentence, these four most strange and most incongruous words, one word and three words so entirely apart that of my own volition never possibly could I have joined them in the same breath.

" This was the sentence, these the words:

CHRIST THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

" Are they meaningless to you? I am sure that if they had come to me normally, if they had been told me by some friend, if I had seen them written on some paper, meaningless they would have been to me. But they did not come normally, they came abnormally. They were told me by no audible voice, they were not seen by me with my eyes. My mind was empty and they suddenly were in my mind; and I suppose it was that, arriving mysteriously in me like that, there arrived with them their interpretation. For between receiving them and understanding what they meant there was no interval. Like a blow, causing me to stop and start, the sentence was into me; and with a rush, causing me, I believe, to take a staggered sideways step or two, tumultuously the meaning was streaming through me and I was overwhelmed and I had to go quickly to a grassy bank just there and sit down to receive it all . . . which I did with a sense of

an extraordinary exhilaration, an uplifting indescribable, of my spirit.

" Christ The Common Denominator — this is the interpretation. The interpretation is, simply, that Jesus Christ, Son of Man and Son of God, is the Common Denominator, the Common Principle of every human being — that He is the element which is common in us all. The interpretation is, simply, that just as He once was on earth among men so He ever since has been and is to-day resident among men, resident in every man — in you, in me, in all. He once, when among men, was visible to them. He is as visible to-day. Every smile, every kind action, every kind thought, seen or felt in those about us, those with whom we live, those whom we only pass and see, is, simply, the Christ who is in them appearing in them.

" Let me explain this as immediately I put it to the proof and explained it to myself. Realising it I arose from the bank where, overwhelmed, I sat down to receive it, and I went quickly along to where I should see people; and in the face of every single one I saw I saw in greater or in less degree the touch, the presence, of Christ; and I knew that it was what there is of Christ in me that thus was recognising and responding to the Christ in these my fellow creatures.

" Christ The Common Denominator. It means that the more there is of love, the more there is of affinity of spirit (which is the spirit of Christ common to us all) between two persons, the greater, by that unity, becomes that spirit of Christ which is in them both. It means that the love (the affinity of spirit which we call love) between brother and sister, between husband and wife, between parent and child, between lover and lover, between friend and friend, is the increase, by conjunction, of that Common Denominator which is in us all — is the

increase, by conjunction, of Christ who dwells in each of us.

" It means much more than that. It means that Christ is in each one of us and that by looking for and calling up the Christ in our every neighbour, and by in so doing enlarging the Christ in ourself, it is in the power of each one of us to raise Christ from the dead — *again.* And more than that it means. Christ The Common Denominator — it means that when we all, always, look first and before anything else for the Christ in our neighbour, in our every fellow man, as now we look for (and find it) in those we love, and by looking for it thereby enlarge the Christ who is in ourself — why, it means that when we all, always, do that, such by multiplication will be the increase of Christ among mankind that *the Second Coming will have happened. . . .*"

" Niggs," (he is telling it) " Niggs, it just is frightful to me, old man, to talk to you like this. It is not the kind of thing that you and I have ever spoken of and the last thing that any men like you or I ever would. But, Niggs, Niggs, old man, this is not — not what you and I would call ' preaching ' that I am trying to tell you. Niggs, this is the tremendous and wonderful Purpose behind the scheme of things that I have got hold of, that by a kind of miracle, just as I have told you, has been put into my mind. . . .

" Niggs," (he is stammering along) " Niggs, old man, what I am trying to tell you is first of all what you and I and every man have often felt: that what we call religion is nothing to us as ordinarily it is presented to us: a fable that our intelligence rejects, a mystery that our materialism refuses, a moral code that our desires abominate; and yet ——. Niggs, is it not so, that despite all that, there is not a man or woman, however ridiculing,

however rejecting, however abandoned, who in some poignant hour has not felt that if only Christ, whoever He may have been, were here again among us as once He was all would be *different,* all solved, all remedied, and no more tears or fears, or needs or cares or sorrows; that if we had the chance of those to whom He came, eagerly we would take it; that if He passed by now in the street out there, tumultuous with joy we would rush out — Niggs, would you not, old man? — to be with him and in his care and shelter. . . .

"And, Niggs, Niggs," (his face is cloudy red, he is stammering; between his nervous diffidence and his most urgent ardour scarcely at moments can he make his words) "And, Niggs, old man, what I am telling you is that Christ *is* here, to-day, now, always, not in the vague religious sense that tells us vaguely his spirit is among a congregation and that leaves us cold, untouched, not able to believe, but that He is here in real and actual presence in each separate and individual one of us. In you, Niggs; Christ his living actual self in you. Niggs, get *that,* old man, and think the power and the wonder of it, and call him up in you and realise and *have* the wonder and the power. And He is in every man and woman whom you meet or see; each time you pass a fellow human being, Niggs, you are passing Christ. Niggs, get *that*; see Christ in every face; and out of every face with which you stop to speak call him to arise to greet you and to love and help you, Niggs. . . .

"Niggs," (his words now hesitate, now rush, now tumble) "Niggs, all the old familiar Bible phrases that to so many seem so meaningless just mean as clear as day all this that I am trying to tell you. 'God sent his only begotten son into the world to save mankind.' Does the intelligence reject it, declare the dreadful sacrifice upon the Cross just the fanaticism of a human man? Niggs,

it was for the increase of the divine purpose that it was done. What else, Niggs, but that terrible and supreme event could have attracted the mind of the world to the purpose of God? It was done for the divine increasing purpose *and it succeeded,* Niggs. It succeeded; that is the proof of it. Christ died and the world from that day forward, nearly two thousand years to this day now, knew what God's purpose was and is. 'Christ rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven;' Niggs, it was into man, into the hearts of men, Niggs, into your heart and to mine that He then ascended. Niggs, it was the increase by that supreme advance of the great Purpose that goes advancing ever on and stands to-day with Christ himself in every man and woman waiting to be raised again from those dead among us, from those in whom He lies entombed just as in his sepulchre He lay entombed, just as . . .

"Niggs," (and that light within his eyes dispels the cloudy redness from his face, levels his voice, commands his words) "Niggs, when I say 'just as' I mean because all to-day is just as all was then. We wish we had the chance of those to whom Christ came, but, Niggs, we have. By that increase of the purpose when He died for us, and dying came into us, He is even more among us now than before He was among us; and daily, hourly, with each base thought, with each mean act, with every selfish thought, anew He suffers crucifixion at our hands. Niggs, in shocked memory live for ever those who mocked crown of thorns upon his head, who tormented his thirst, who drove the spear into his side; and hourly ourselves we mock, do torture, drive the spear anew. Niggs, Christ the Common Denominator, the spirit common in us all, placed there two thousand years ago to advance the great purpose that, Niggs, goes swelling ever on until again we raise him from ourselves, the dead,

and the great Purpose is at last fulfilled, his kingdom established here on earth . . ."

He is finished; and, finishing, realising what he has realised as he spoke and as he sees his spoken words' effects, his story here is finished. His he knows now, when Andrew takes his hands and says, "Sim, Sim!" and goes to Linda, his he knows then to go out to the world as he had just gone out to Andrew.

> That to the height of his great argument
> He may assert eternal Providence
> And justify the ways of God to Men.

He is finished and here upon that great resolve of his runs out his story.

Andrew who had not dared go in to Linda goes in; and strong in love which casteth out death, and strong in knowledge, Christ in himself and Christ in all, casts himself on his knees beside her bed and calls her — "Linda!"

And she, like as the maid to whom, asleep, was called "Arise!" in wonder murmurs to him —"Andrew!"

He cries, "My Linda, my beautiful, my loveliest!"

"Andrew!"

He puts an arm beneath the pillow and lifts her, pillowed, to him; and holds her to his breast. "Stay with me, Linda; Linda, my own, my beautiful, my loveliest of all, stay with me, stay with me, ever and ever, my darling dear, my lovely and beloved dear!"

"Andrew, Andrew!"

The doctor sees her in the morning and finds her sleeping, her hands that had lain open, all abandoned, held in her husband's hands; he sees her in the afternoon, awake, her hands both in her husband's hand, his cheek against

her own; and he comes down to Sim and has a laugh and makes again that sinking motion with one hand arrested by the other and laughs again: "Well, that's been found," he says.

Sim says, "And I have found as well;" and in few days has left them, and is coming home and hears the train that had beat "Hasten" singing instead a stave from those seats of old Yeoman's: "Then cheerly on, then cheerly on!"; and sits there thinking, "'Knowledge — a little more,' I said that to Elisabeth one day: 'Knowledge — a little more, and courage, courage;' and I was given the knowledge and only lacked the courage and knew I lacked it and yet did not know. First I knew Kingdom of Heaven knowledge, Heaven's Kingdom set in us all, and then I knew I had no courage and knowing it could not screw up to tell my brother whom telling I might have had here with me today; then I knew Christ in every one of us, and did not think of courage, and took the easiest way, and forgetting courage and taking the easy way came near to losing Andrew as he had been lost had Linda died. Who would have read my book? One here, one there, who else? Not courage even to put to it my name — who of my friends not knowing I had written it would read it? I cannot think of one. When Linda turned to me, 'Tell me some good stuff, Sim;' when Andrew turned to me, 'Pray, Sim; for God's sake, pray;' I knew it was myself, no book, must go to people as these had come to me. I knew, I know

> That to the height of this great argument
> I must assert eternal Providence
> And justify the ways of God to Men.

"Courage, I shall need it; but courage — of God I take it and hold on to it."

He makes his plans. He will travel the country, telling his gospel as he goes. And travel how? Riding abroad on Ethelred, debating ways and means, he comes upon the caravan of B. C. D. still standing where it had been left. It is the very thing; and B. C. D. declares it is indeed, and has it out and it is painted and equipped, and Andrew gives a horse suited to slow and heavy work like this, and all is ready for the task for which he longs and which he — dreads.

Dreading it, shrinking in all his flesh from facing men and women in a capacity so utterly estranged from all his habitual way of life, he will start, he determines, by night. A market town, and market day, is chosen by him for his opening; he dare not travel in conspicuously by day; morning shall find him planted there. Elisabeth comes down to speed him on; and between him and Elisabeth has happened that which, greeting him immediately on his return from Linda and his return to put his new-found resolution into being, struck at that resolution with a wound that caused him literally to stand for support against his room wall, hands to his head. Miss Andiron was dead. "Dear," wrote Elisabeth, "I now am free."

"And I am bound," he groaned within himself; "ah, at the very moment of my knowledge of what I am to do, for this to come to me!"

She was telling him, as on the night of his departure she walked with him beside the horse to the foot of the hill where it was arranged she should leave him, that which when first he went to her after her news she had told him. "Sim, once again it is just the choice — what we would do, what we know we should do; what self desires, what selflessness demands. Sim, there is only one thing in life that does not matter and that is self; only one real freedom in life and that is freedom from self; only one real happiness, the happiness that comes from others'

happiness. Twice we have proved it; now comes the third and best time, Sim."

He had questioned, "The best?"

She was telling him now again why best. "Sim, just a year. Before when there stood between us what we knew was right it seemed for all time, never to end. Only a year now, Sim. Go, unfettered, with no thoughts except thought of your Purpose, just for one year. You will know then what you have done and you will see then how best to go on doing it; if in the same way and alone — why, happy you will be it was the way you chose; if with so much then done and learnt all that remains can more easily be done with me to help you — why, then ——."

He has held her in his arms: "Elisabeth, Elisabeth!" "Sim, Sim!"

He is climbing the hill, the tail-lamp of the caravan receding steadily, steadily from her as she watches it.

She gives it all her eyes, as all her heart, and sees it fade, fade, fade, from smallest point of light to point that now she thinks while she draws breath again must go. Not to be witness of that point of sudden vanishing she closes her eyes; then in a little opens them again. It has not gone. It hangs above the hilltop, sole point of light upon a dark and starless night. "Sim!" she breathes to it; then, as unchanging it hangs there and seems to give a light beyond itself, she knows and understands.

It is a star come out.

Postscript

On a day of a time a little later Miss Marr, regarding Lardy Quinnet, was caused by what she saw to have a little tinge of colour come into her cheeks. In a voice very unusual to her, soft, warmly pleased;

"Lardy," she said, "Lardy, you are wearing one of Sim Paris's ribbons!"

"I am," said Lardy, "and shall. I went to hear him last night. He had got his caravan on Clapham Common. The Man with the Lamp they call him; and talk about crowds! There must have been hundreds who couldn't have got near enough to hear. I heard. And when he came at the end to handing out those ribbons I took one and stuffed it in right there. You know what it means — it means just 'I went to Church with my mother as a kid; I shall be buried by the Church; in between I am dashed if I scoff at the Church. I may not be this, that or the other, but I am dashed if I am ashamed to own up to the faith I was born in and look to die in. This shows I am not ashamed of doing that.'

"Well," continued Lardy, "I am dashed if I am ashamed; wherefore —" and he waved his fingers at his ribbon.

THE END

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